

Amy Walton

"Penelope and the Others"

Chapter One.

Penelope's Plan.

Penelope Hawthorne sat in the school-room window-seat at Easney Vicarage, one afternoon, looking very gravely out at the garden.

She had sat there for some time, with her hands in her lap and a little troubled frown on her forehead, and anyone who knew her well would have guessed at once that she was thinking over a "plan."

Penelope was just thirteen years old, the eldest of the Hawthorne children, and as she was a thoughtful girl and fond of reading, she often made very good plans for her brothers and sisters' amusement, partly out of her own head, and partly out of books. But this particular plan quite puzzled her, for it had nothing to do with amusement, and she did not at all see how it was to be carried out. Yet it was much too good to be given up.

The plan was this. To buy a new Chinese mandarin for Miss Unity Cheffins.

Now Miss Unity was Pennie's godmother, and lived in the Cathedral Close at Nearminster, which was two miles away from the village of Easney. Amongst her knick-knacks and treasures there used to be a funny little china figure called a mandarin which had always stood on her sitting-room mantel-piece since the children could remember anything. This had unfortunately been broken by a friend of Pennie's whilst the two girls were on a visit at Nearminster; and though it had not been her fault, Pennie felt as if she were responsible for the accident. She found out that her godmother had a great affection for the queer little mandarin, and it made her sorry whenever she went to Nearminster to see his place empty, and to think that he would never nod his head any more.

She felt all the more sorry when one day, in the cupboard by the fireplace, she caught sight of a little heap of china

fragments which she knew were the remains of the poor mandarin, and saw by the bottle of cement near that her godmother had been trying vainly to stick him together. After this she began to wonder whether it would be possible to replace Miss Unity's favourite. Could she, if she saved all her money, get another figure exactly like it? Where were such things to be bought? No doubt in London, where, she had heard her father say, you could get anything in the world. It would therefore be easy to get another mandarin so like the first that Miss Unity would hardly know the difference, and to set it up on the mantel-piece in her room.

Pennie thought and thought, until this beautiful idea grew to perfect proportions in her mind. She pictured Miss Unity's surprise and pleasure, and had settled the new mandarin in all his glory at Nearminster, before one serious drawback occurred to her—want of money. If she were to save up her money for years, she would not have enough, for though she did not know the cost of the figure, she had heard it spoken of as "valuable." What a very long time it would be before sixpence a week would buy anything you could call "valuable!" Pennie did not see her way out of it at all, though she worked endless sums on scraps of paper, and worried over it both in play-hours and lesson-time.

This afternoon it was still in her mind when Miss Grey, the governess, came into the school-room with the other children and called her away from the window-seat where she had sat so long. Pennie gave up her thoughts with a sigh and prepared to write out her French translation, while her sister Nancy and her two brothers Ambrose and David were reading history aloud. She gave her task only half her attention, however, and sat staring at the words for some time without thinking of their meaning. It was one of Aesop's fables that she had to put into French. "Union is strength," said the motto; and as she read it over for the twentieth time a sudden and splendid idea flashed across her mind.

"Of course!" she exclaimed aloud in triumph.

"Another bad mark, Pennie," said Miss Grey; for talking in school hours was one of Pennie's failings.

But she was now so possessed with her new idea and so eager to carry it out, that bad marks did not seem of much consequence. She scrambled through her other lessons, straining her ears all the while for the first tinkle of the four o'clock bell sounding from the village school, for that was the

signal that lessons at the rectory were also over for the afternoon. There then remained one precious hour before tea-time, and in summer there was an immediate rush into the garden and fields.

At last the welcome sound came. Nancy was generally the first to announce it, but to-day Pennie was beforehand.

"It's begun, Miss Grey," she exclaimed, starting up so hastily that cotton, scissors, and thimble, all fell on the ground.

"More haste worse speed, Pennie," said Miss Grey. "Now you will have to stay and pick up all those things and put them neatly away."

Poor Pennie gathered up her property as quickly as she could, but the hateful thimble, as if it knew she was in a hurry, rolled into a dark corner and could not be found.

"Oh, *does* it matter to-day?" she asked pleadingly, as Nancy, Ambrose, and David, having put away their books, rushed headlong past her, and she heard their first yells of delight as they burst into the garden. "I'll find it afterwards—I *really* will."

But Miss Grey was firm.

"You are too careless, Pennie. I must have it found before you go out."

Pennie groped about the school-room floor, groaning with vexation. The others would be all scattered about, and she would never get them to listen to her plan. What did a stupid thimble matter in comparison? If it were lost for ever, so much the better. Nancy at least might have stayed to help. While she was peering and poking about, and fuming and grumbling, Dickie came into the room ready for the garden, in her round holland pinafore, and grasping a basket and spade.

Dickie, whose real name was Delicia, was only five years old and not yet admitted to the school-room, but she was fond of escaping from the nursery whenever she could and joining the others in their games. She at once cast herself flat on the floor to help in the search, and in this position not only spied the thimble under the fender, but by means of the spade succeeded to her great delight in poking it out.

In another minute she and Pennie were running across the lawn to a part of the garden called the Wilderness, where only

Ambrose was to be found soberly digging in his garden, and quite ready for conversation. But Pennie would not unfold the plan unless the others heard it too. David at any rate was sure to be in the barn feeding his rabbits, and perhaps Nancy might be with him. So to the barn they all took their way.

The barn was large and roomy, quite unused except by the children, who kept all their pets and a good deal of what Andrew the gardener called "rubbage" there. At one end the boys had fixed a swing and some rope-ladders, on which they practised all sorts of monkey-like feats. At the other lived David's rabbits in numerous hutches, Ambrose's owl, a jackdaw, a squirrel, and a wonderfully large family of white mice. Besides those captives there were bats which lived free but retired lives high up in the rafters, flapping and whirring about when dusk came on. Pigeons also flew in and out, and pecked at the various morsels of food left about on the ground, so that the barn was a thickly-peopled place, with plenty of noise and flutter, and much coming and going through its wide doors.

When the children entered, Nancy was lazily swinging herself backwards and forwards while she watched David, who moved steadily from hutch to hutch, with a box of bran under one arm and a huge bunch of green meat under the other.

"Come and hear Pennie's plan," said Ambrose; "she won't tell it till you all listen."

"I can't come," said David, "I've got to finish feeding the rabbits, and after that I must do up my pig for the night. There's only just time before tea."

"Why don't you come in and tell it here if you want to?" said Nancy, shoving herself off with her foot. "Look here. Ambrose, I've touched the rafters twice. You couldn't."

It did not seem a very promising moment.

"If I do will you *really* listen?" said Pennie, sitting down on a packing-case midway between David and Nancy, "because it's an important plan."

David nodded, and Nancy in her wild passage through the air, now high up in the roof, now low down on the floor of the barn, screamed out "All right! Go on." It was not of much consequence, but Pennie felt vexed with her. She might at *least* have stopped swinging. Turning her full attention therefore on Ambrose and David, whom she hoped to impress, she began:

"It's not exactly a pleasure plan, it's a sort of sacrificing plan, and I want you to help me."

"I don't know a bit what you mean," said Nancy; "but if it isn't pleasant, what's the good of it?"

"It *is* pleasant," said Pennie hurriedly, for she saw a cold look of disapproval on David's face; "not at first, but *afterwards*."

"I like a plan that's pleasant first, and afterwards, and all the time," said Nancy, who was now standing still on the swing.

It was worse for Nancy to listen in this mood than to pay no attention.

"I wish you'd go on swinging, Nancy," said Pennie impatiently, "you only interrupt."

"Oh, all right!" said Nancy. "I thought you wanted us to listen. I don't like the beginning at any rate."

She launched herself into motion again, but Pennie was uneasily conscious that she could still hear every word, and though she explained her plan as well as she could, she felt she was not doing it justice. She got through it, however, without any further interruption.

"Wouldn't it be nice," she said after dwelling on Miss Unity's attachment to the mandarin, "if we *all* saved up some money and put it into a box, and when we got enough if we *all* bought a new mandarin, and *all* gave it her? I wanted to do it by myself, but I never could. It would take too long."

She looked anxiously at her hearers. No one spoke at first. David seemed entirely occupied in picking out the choicest bits of parsley and carrot for Goliath, his biggest rabbit; but at last he said moodily:

"Ethelwyn broke it."

"Mean thing!" exclaimed Nancy's voice on high.

"Yes, I know," murmured Pennie.

"Then," continued David, "she ought to pay for a new one. Not us."

"But she never would," said Ambrose. "Why, I don't suppose she even remembers doing it."

"If there ever was," put in Nancy, "anyone I hated, it was that stupid Ethelwyn."

"You oughtn't to say that, Nancy," said Pennie reprovingly. "You know mother doesn't like you to say you hate people."

"Well, I won't say so, then; but I did all the same, and so did you at last."

"Will anyone agree to the plan?" asked Pennie dejectedly, for she felt that the proposal had been a failure. To her surprise David turned round from the row of hutches.

"I will," he said, "because she was so kind once, but I can't give it every week. I'll give it when I don't want it very much for something else."

Ambrose remained silent a little while. He was rather vexed that David had made this offer before he had spoken himself, for he did not like his younger brother to take the lead.

"I don't call that much of a sacrifice," he said at length. "I shall give some every week."

Dickie had listened to all this without any clear idea as to what it meant, but she could not bear to be left out of any scheme, and she now said firmly:

"Me will too."

Her offer was received with laughter.

"You've got no pocket-money, Dickie," said Pennie.

"She's got her slug-money," observed David. This property of Dickie's consisted of the payment for slugs and snails which she collected in a flower-pot and delivered to Andrew for execution. He kept the account chalked up in the potting shed, and when it reached a hundred, Dickie was entitled to ask her father for a penny.

"I call it a shame to take her slug-money," cried out Nancy from the swing.

"No one wants to *take* it," replied Pennie, "but she shall give it if she likes."

"I call it a stupid old plan, with nothing pleasant about it at all," were Nancy's last words as they all left the barn.

Pennie tried to treat those remarks with indifference, but she was in truth wounded and discouraged by them, and felt, moreover, that they were likely to affect the boys unfavourably. She observed that Ambrose became very thoughtful as they approached the house, and presently he asked in an off-hand manner:

"How long do you suppose it will take us to buy a mandarin?"

Pennie could not say, but she thought it might be a long while, because she had heard that china figures of that sort were expensive, "and of course," she added, "we must get one of the *very best*."

"Oh, of course!" said Ambrose at once. But he began to reflect that it would be very dull never to have any pocket-money to spend, and to wish that he had followed David's prudent example. He could not possibly draw back now, but he hoped the mandarin might not prove quite so expensive as Pennie thought.

Pennie herself hardly knew what to think about the success of her plan. It certainly had not been received very heartily, but there was no reason why it should fail if Ambrose and David would remain true to their promise. That was the question. Much patience and self-denial would be needed, and it was unfortunate that next month there would be a great temptation in the way—Cheddington Fair.

David had only agreed to give his share when he did not want to spend it on anything else. Now even without the attractions of a fair there are plenty of ways of spending 4 pence a week, and though he had a thrifty nature, David had never found any difficulty in laying out his money. Again, Nancy's behaviour had been most disappointing. She had always been so fond of the old mandarin, who had so often nodded his head for her pleasure, that Pennie had counted on her support, but instead of this she had only displayed a most perverse and provoking spirit.

Pennie sighed to remember all these drawbacks, but she determined not to be beaten without an effort, and directly after

tea she set about preparing a box to receive all possible contributions. Would David lend his china cottage for the purpose? This being graciously given she printed the words, "For the Mandarin" in large letters on a piece of paper, pasted it on the front, and set the house up on the school-room mantel-piece that it might be constantly before the general eye.

Chapter Two.

The Roman Camp.

It was about a week after this that the children one day persuaded Miss Grey to go home across Rumborough Common after a walk. She never liked to do so, because it was a lonely, desolate place frequented by gypsies and tramps, but the boys had a special reason for wishing it. There were the remains of what was called a Roman camp there, which, they felt sure, was full of strange and curious things—coins, medals, bones, beads, all manner of desirable objects to add to their collection for the museum. They had never been lucky enough to find any, but hope did not forsake them, and as often as they could persuade Miss Grey to cross the common, they lingered behind the others as much as they possibly could and kept an eager look-out.

Unfortunately, Miss Grey never walked so fast as in that particular spot, and was always urging them to quicken their pace, so that it was possible to miss many valuable curiosities. Otherwise, with time before them, and the aid of a spade and a pickaxe, Ambrose and David felt that they could have unearthed treasures which would have filled their museum easily. To-day they were so far behind that Miss Grey and their sisters were almost out of sight. Ambrose had been giving David a little solid information about the Romans, their wars, customs, and personal appearance, when he was suddenly interrupted by his brother.

"I suppose," said David, "you forgot the museum when you told Pennie you'd give your money every week?"

Ambrose did not want to be reminded of that promise, which he had already begun to regret; besides, this question showed that David had not been attending to the Romans.

"Why, of course," he said impatiently; "we sha'n't buy things for the museum. We shall just find them by degrees."

"I don't believe we shall ever get enough things before the winter," replied David, with his eyes fixed on the short dry turf at his feet. "Oh, look!" he exclaimed suddenly, "there's a funny snail."

Ambrose stooped to examine it. It was an empty white shell with curious black stripes on it.

"It's a Roman snail," he said rising with a superior air. "You know they used to eat them."

David stood with his short legs wide apart, his hands in his pockets, his grave eyes fixed on the shell in his brother's hand.

"Did the Romans bring it?" he asked. "How very old it must be!"

"How stupid you are!" said Ambrose. "Of course I meant they brought some like it, and then there got to be more and more snails—like Sir Walter Raleigh and the potato."

"It'll do nicely for the museum, won't it?" said David, "and we'll write a label for it with '*Roman snail, found near Rumborough Camp.*'" By this time it was no longer possible to avoid seeing that Miss Grey was waving her parasol in the far distance. Probably one of the girls would be sent back to fetch them if they did not go at once, so with the snail carefully secured they set off towards her at a quick trot.

"Don't you wish," jerked out Ambrose in short sentences as he ran, "that father would bring us—with a spade—and dig—and find things?"

"It would be splendid," gasped David. "Do you think he would?"

"I say," called out Ambrose, without replying to this, as they got near to the others, "guess what we've found."

"A skull," said Nancy at once, mentioning the thing which the boys wanted most for their museum.

"How could it be a skull, silly?" said Ambrose scornfully, "when I'm holding it inside my hand?"

More guesses followed, but in vain, and at last the Roman snail was displayed to the wondering gaze of Pennie and Nancy. Not that they had any part or lot in matters concerning the museum. That belonged to the boys alone, and was jealously guarded as their very own. Ever since Ambrose had been with

his father to the museum at Nearminster he and David had made up their minds to have one, and had begun with great fervour to collect objects for it. Other interests, however, had come in the way, and the museum languished until one day Mrs Hawthorne had offered them a tiny empty room at the top of the house for their own. It was not much bigger than a cupboard, and had a very sloping roof, but to the boys it seemed a palace.

What a place for the museum! They at once set to work to put up shelves, to write labels, and to give it as much as possible the appearance of the one at Nearminster. Ambrose hit upon an idea which added a good deal to this. He printed the words "*To the Museum*" on some cards, with an arrow to point the way, and when these were pasted on the staircase wall they had a capital effect. But though it began to have quite a business-like air, the museum was still woefully empty. Even when spread out to their widest extent, it was impossible to make three fossils, a few birds' eggs, and one dried snake's skin look otherwise than meagre even in a small room. The boys arranged these over and over again in different positions, and wrote very large labels for them, but they were disturbed by the consciousness that it was not an interesting collection, and that it must be increased before the 1st of November. This would be their mother's birthday, and they then intended to invite her to see the museum and to declare it open.

All this, therefore, made Rumborough Common, with its store of hidden treasure, an unusually interesting place, and it was almost too tantalising to be hurried past the camp with only a longing glance. Ambrose especially, since his visit to the Nearminster museum, had been fired with ambition to make a thorough search. Visions of strange-shaped daggers and spears, bronze cups and bowls with mysterious inscriptions on them, rusty ornaments, and other relics floated continually before him. There they were, all waiting hidden below, ready to fill the empty shelves of the museum. If only father would consent to go with him and David, and let them poke about as much as they liked. That would be the only plan, and after much consideration and many talks together both the boys came to the conclusion that the vicar must be asked. Who was to ask him? The question was as usual settled by casting lots, and it fell to Ambrose.

Now, unluckily, the vicar was at this time specially busy. There was to be a clerical meeting at Nearminster at which he had promised to read a paper, and the preparation of this filled up

all his spare time. At such moments it required courage to knock at his door and ask questions, and Ambrose drew back a little. Urged, however, by David, and by the thoughts of the treasure, he at length made the effort. Directly he got into the room he saw by all the great books his father had open on the table, and by the frown on his brow, that he was deeply engrossed. He looked up, certainly, and seemed to listen, but he was evidently very far-away from anything connected with Rumborough Common. Gathering, however, that he was asked to go somewhere, he looked back at his papers and shook his head.

"My dear boy," he said, "I will listen to you another time, but none of you are to come and ask me questions just now. Run away to your mother."

His pen began to scratch away over the paper at a dreadful rate, and Ambrose returned dejectedly to tell David of his failure. They felt quite cast-down by it. Mother and father were both going away next week. They were invited to stay at Miss Unity's house during the clerical meeting, taking Dickie with them, and would not be home for four days. This would make a terrible long delay, and it seemed impossible to wait all that time before asking their father again. Yet what could be done?

Ambrose felt the disappointment more severely than David. His mind was so fixed on carrying out his idea that he brooded over it by day and even dreamed of it at night. Often he saw the shelves of the museum crowded with all his heart could desire in the way of curious and ancient objects. But this did not advance matters at all. They remained in the cold light of day as bare as ever, with great spaces between the few specimens, and by degrees, as he gazed mournfully at them, a thought began to take shape in his mind and to become more and more enticing.

Why should not he and David go to Rumborough Camp alone? Certainly he had an impression that it would be wrong, but as far as he could remember it had never been distinctly forbidden, so what harm could there be in it? He tried to remember if his father or mother had ever said, "You are not to go alone to Rumborough Common." No. Try as hard as he could he remembered no such words. In his heart of hearts Ambrose was conscious all the time that if known such a thing would not be allowed, for he and David never went beyond the fields round the house unless Miss Grey or nurse were with them: they had occasionally been as far as Farmer Hatchard's with a message, but that was the extreme limit.

He would not, however, let his mind dwell on this, for the expedition began to appear so attractive, so bold, daring, and altogether delightful, that all other considerations seemed dull and tame. He was almost tempted to undertake it quite alone, but a little reflection showed him that a companion would be decidedly useful. Rumborough Common was a desolate and somewhat alarming place, and besides he might find too many valuable curiosities to carry home by himself. David's advice and help must certainly, therefore, be asked.

What would he think of it? Ambrose felt a little bit doubtful. Not that David wanted either courage or enterprise for such an undertaking, and if once started upon it he would be sure to carry it through with undaunted perseverance, but—he was so matter-of-fact. He would certainly say at once that it would be against rules, for he had a tiresome way of looking things straight in the face, instead of turning his eyes a little to one side when it was more convenient or pleasant to do so.

At any rate, he must be asked to go; but Ambrose went on to consider that this need not be done until Monday after their father and mother had gone to Nearminster. That would be two days hence, which would give him time to think over his plan and make preparations, so that all might be ready to meet any difficulties from David. Ambrose began to feel very important when he had settled all this in his mind; it was such an immense idea that it was most difficult to keep it all within himself, and he went about with such an air of superiority to daily events that the other children knew at once he had a secret.

"You look just like Dickie's bantam hen when she has laid an egg," said Nancy; "but I sha'n't try to guess what you're thinking about. It's sure to have something to do with that stupid museum."

Ambrose meanwhile began his preparations. He and David both possessed garden spades, which would be useful; but the ground on Rumborough Common was hard and chalky, and he felt sure that they would require a pickaxe as well. Andrew had one, but he was surly about lending his tools, and there was no chance of getting at them, for he kept them carefully locked up, and never left any lying about in the garden.

"I say, Andrew," said Ambrose in a careless manner, "I wish you'd just lend me your pickaxe, please; just to break up some hard ground."

"You're not man enough to use it, Master Ambrose," said Andrew. "It's too heavy for ye. There's a nice light hoe now, I'd let ye have that for a bit."

"That wouldn't do," said Ambrose. "It's very hard ground. A hoe would be of no use at all. I want the pickaxe particularly."

Andrew shook his head.

"Can't loan ye the pickaxe, young master. You'd be doing yourself a mischief;" and he took up his barrow and went his way.

So that was of no use. Ambrose began to long for Monday to come that he might tell David and have his help and advice. It was an odd thing to wish for his father and mother to go away. They seldom left home, and when they did there was a general outcry and lamentation among the children, because it was so dull without them. Yet now Ambrose felt it would be a decided relief when they had gone to Nearminster, for then he might unburden himself of his great secret.

The time came at last. Ruby, the grey horse, stood waiting with the waggonette at the door. Andrew sat on the box, ready to drive his master and mistress into Nearminster. He looked quite a different Andrew on these occasions from the one who worked in the garden, because he wore his best coat and hat, which were a size too large for him, and a roomy pair of white gloves.

The children were all in the hall watching the departure.

"Don't stay longer than you can help, mother," said Pennie; "it's horrid when you're away."

Mrs Hawthorne kissed them all and said good-bye. She hoped they would be quite obedient to Miss Grey while she was away, and Ambrose thought she looked specially at him as she spoke. He flushed a little as he joined with the others in promising to remember this.

"Now, then," said the vicar coming out of his study, "are we ready? Where's Dickie?"

Dickie came steadily down-stairs just then, step by step, rather encumbered in her movements by a large Noah's ark, which she clutched to her breast. She was calmly triumphant. Nurse followed her, still suggesting all manner of other toys as more convenient to carry—"a pretty doll now"—but Dickie was firm.

The Noah's ark was her last birthday present; she must and would take it to Nearminster, and moreover she would carry it down-stairs herself. So it had to go; but the moment she was lifted with it into the waggonette she pulled out the sliding lid in the roof to find the *efilant*, as she called it, and most of the animals tumbled out. This made it necessary for all the children to throw themselves into the carriage to pick them up, so that there was a good deal of delay in starting. At last, however, all was really settled, and they drove off, Ambrose and David rushing on in front, as usual, to open the gate and scream out the last good-byes.

"Remember to be good boys," said their mother, leaning towards them as she passed; and again Ambrose felt as though she were speaking specially to him. He was not going to be a good boy. That he knew, but he would not think about it. It was pleasanter to fix his thoughts on all the advantages to be gained if David would only agree to his proposal, and make no awkward objections. He would tell him that very evening after tea, when they were going to fix a new shelf in the museum. Both the boys had been taught the use of saw and plane by the village carpenter, and were quite used to doing odd jobs for themselves. David in particular excelled in anything requiring neatness of finish, and took great pride in the fittings of the museum, which he was continually adding to and altering. The shelves were made of any bits of wood the boys had been able to get, so that at present they were all of different colours, and did not please him. He had it in his mind to ask Andrew for some white paint, with which he could produce a very superior effect, and indeed he was far more engrossed just now with the fittings of the museum than with objects to be put into it.

Armed with a large hammer, which he wielded with great skill and determination for so small a boy, he set to work in the museum directly after tea. Ambrose looked on listlessly. How should he introduce the subject with which his mind was full? There was certainly no room for it just now between the energetic blows which David was dealing, as he fastened up the new shelf into its place. At last he stopped and fell back a little to look at his work.

"Is that straight?" he asked.

"It's straight enough," answered Ambrose moodily, "but I don't see much good in putting it up."

David turned round with a face of wonder. "We must have shelves," he said.

"But we haven't got anything to put on them," replied Ambrose. "It looks silly to have them all empty."

David looked rather mournful.

"Of course they'd be much better full," he agreed; "but what can we do? How can we get things?"

"Isn't it a pity," said Ambrose, "that we couldn't ask father to take us to Rumborough? We could find enough there to fill the museum easily in half an hour."

David nodded and sighed.

"Why shouldn't we go alone?" said Ambrose, making a bold plunge. "I know the way." He looked full at his brother.

David did not seem at all startled. He merely said, as he put his hammer into the tool-box—"Miss Grey wouldn't let us."

"But," continued Ambrose, feeling it easier now that he had begun, "suppose we didn't ask her?"

David's attention was at last stirred. He turned his blue eyes gravely towards Ambrose.

"Father and mother wouldn't like that," he said.

Ambrose was quite ready for this objection. "Well," he said, "we don't know whether they would or not, because we can't ask them now."

"They wouldn't," repeated David decidedly.

"Mother would like the museum to be full," continued Ambrose; "we know that. And we can't get things anywhere else. She never said we were not to go to Rumborough alone."

David sat cross-legged on the floor beside his tool-box in an attitude of the deepest thought. The idea began to be attractive, but he had not the least doubt that it was wrong.

"We know, all the same, that she wouldn't let us go if we did ask her," he said at last.

Ambrose felt that it was time to strike a decided blow.

"Well," he said, with the air of one who has made up his mind, "I shall go—and of course you needn't if you're afraid. I shall bring home the things and put my name on all the labels, because they'll all belong to me. It'll scarcely be your museum at all."

David's face fell. A vision rose before him of Ambrose returning from Rumborough laden with antiquities, and writing his name large upon each. He, David, would have no right to any of them. Besides, how could he miss the intense joy of digging in Rumborough Camp, of hearing his spade strike with a hollow "clink" against some iron casket or rusty piece of armour? Perhaps they might even be lucky enough to find a skull! It was too much to resist.

"I'll come," he said slowly. "I know it's wrong, but I'll come. And I'm not a bit afraid, so you needn't think that."

This settled, they continued to talk over the details of the expedition—the time, the tools, and so on. Here, as Ambrose had hoped, David proved of much service. He fixed at once on the best hour to start. It must be quite early in the morning, between five and six o'clock, so that they might be there and back before they were missed.

"We can get out by the garden door," he said; "and if they do see us coming back it won't matter much, because we shall have got the things."

David further suggested that a sack would be useful to bear home the treasure, laid a deep plan for the capture of Andrew's pickaxe, and threw himself by degrees heart and soul into the project.

Ambrose had not the least fear now that he would draw back or relax his efforts. He knew that once David had made up his mind he would prove a stout support all the way through, and this was a great relief, for he began to see that there were dangers attending the expedition, and would not have gone alone on any account. It occurred to him, especially when he was in bed and it was quite dark, that Rumborough Common was a favourite haunt of gypsies, tramps, and all sorts of lawless wandering people.

In old days it had been a noted spot for highwaymen, and though Ambrose liked to read about them and their daring exploits, he shivered to think of meeting them in person alone. It was some comfort to remember that there were no

highwaymen now, but there were plenty of perils left to think of and make him uncomfortable, and at such times he half regretted having planned the expedition at all. Now, however, he could fall back on the thought that David was going too, and there was such support in this that it lost half its terrors.

On the evening before the day fixed for the expedition all was ready. The pickaxe, secured in one of Andrew's unguarded moments, two spades, and a large sack lay hidden in the thick ivy which covered the wall near the garden gate. Nothing remained but to wake early enough the next morning, before anyone was up, and creep out unobserved. The person most to be feared was Andrew, who had an awkward habit of coming to his work at all sorts of odd hours. The boys were inclined to doubt sometimes if he ever went to bed, for he seemed to know exactly what kind of weather it had been all night. However that must be risked, although it would be most undesirable to meet him with the pickaxe in their possession.

Ambrose went to bed in a fever of excitement, with a mind firmly fixed on keeping his eyes wide open until morning, for that was the only way to be sure of being awake at the right time. It depended on him alone, for David was such a profound sleeper that he could not be relied on at all: it would most likely be very difficult even to rouse him at the proper hour. Very soon, from the little bed next to him, Ambrose heard the deep regular breathing, which showed that he was in the land of dreams. How could he sleep on such an exciting occasion?

Hour after hour sounded from the old church tower; shadows from the sprays of ivy outside danced on the window-blind in the moonlight; now and then a dog barked a long way off, and was answered by a nearer one. What a long, long while the night lasted if you were not asleep! Ambrose tossed restlessly on his pillow, and longed for the morning to come. It seemed very soon after this that the next hour sounded. He counted the strokes: these ought to have been 12, but there were only 5. Could the clock be wrong? He started up and looked round the room; it was not lighted by the moon now; it was broad daylight, and he had been to sleep after all!

The first thing was to waken David, who was lying in a tranquil slumber with a smile on his face, as though Rumborough Camp had no existence. Ambrose called him gently and then shook him, but though he half-opened his eyes he immediately shut them again, turned on his side with a deep and comfortable sigh, and was faster asleep than ever. Some decided step must be taken. Without an instant's hesitation Ambrose got a wet

sponge and laid it on his brother's face. David woke with a snort of disgust and started up.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Hush-sh-ush!" said Ambrose, holding up a warning finger; "it's time to start. *Rumborough*, you know."

Thoroughly wakened by these words David was out of bed in an instant, and the two boys, creeping stealthily about the room, quickly huddled on their clothes. Then they went on tiptoe down the stairs, which creaked under their guilty footsteps as though they cried "Stop thief!" and on through the wide, silent hall, where Snuff the terrier, coiled on his mat, looked at them with an air of sleepy surprise, but did not stir.

But then came a difficulty. The garden door closed with a bolt high above their reach, so that David had to mount upon his brother's back to get at it. Even then he could not manage to move it at first, for it was rusty, and when he did succeed it shot back with sudden violence and made enough noise to waken the whole household. The boys stared horror-stricken at each other, but there was no movement to be heard in the house. Recovering courage they quickly picked up their tools, and were soon fairly started on their way. This led for a short distance along the high-road until, crossing a stile, they came to broad meadows, where Farmer Hatchard's cows were munching peacefully away at the short dewy grass. So far they were not beyond the allowed limits, and though they instinctively drew closer together as they passed through the herd of cows, they felt that none of the perils of the adventure had begun.

It was all familiar ground until they had passed the farm. Then came Blackberry Lane, which was a short cut to Rumborough Common. Blackberry Lane was so narrow that the straggling brambles and honeysuckles in the tall hedges almost met overhead. It was very steep, very stony, and always rather dark, a place, where it was easy to imagine any number of robbers lying in wait. The boys climbed slowly up the steep ascent, casting awed glances to right and left. The pickaxe weighed heavily on Ambrose's shoulder, and David had quite as much as he could do to trudge along with two spades and a sack.

It was a relief when they came suddenly out of the gloomy shadows of the lane on to the broad expanse of Rumborough Common. There it lay stretched out before them, with a rough cart track across the middle of it. A lonely, cheerless-looking

place! Bare of trees, except for one group of ragged firs, which marked the position of what was called the Camp. Not a house in sight, not a sign of life anywhere, nothing to break its even surface but some pools of water glimmering coldly grey in the morning light.

A sudden fear seized on Ambrose as he and David stood still for a moment to take breath. Brought face to face with Rumborough Common in this way, it seemed to present all manner of possible perils, which might come to light at any moment. He would willingly have turned back, and had he been alone would certainly have done so; but—David was there. It would not do to show any want of courage before his younger brother, who, moreover, had given no sign of wishing to give up the expedition. They must go on; they must cross that wide space which lay between them and the camp; they must reach those dark threatening fir-trees, and encounter, very likely, some desperate characters lying there in ambush, ready to spring upon the lonely traveller. All the romantic tales he had ever read, all the worst stories of bloodshed and horrors crowded upon Ambrose's mind as the two boys plodded steadily along the cart track, bending a little under their burdens.

"Andrew said once that there used to be a ghost here," said David, breaking the silence.

"Don't," said Ambrose, giving him a sharp dig with his elbow.

"He was a tinker," continued David, "and he drowned himself in one of the ponds."

"I wish you wouldn't be so silly," said Ambrose impatiently. "You know there aren't any ghosts. You know father says so—and besides they never stay out after cock-crow—and besides, if there were they couldn't hurt us."

"Mother says nothing will hurt us if we're not doing wrong," said David; "but we are doing wrong, aren't we?"

Ambrose gave a nervous laugh, which sounded to himself very thin and funny.

"If there are any ghosts here, I should think they'd be Roman ghosts," he said.

A Roman ghost was a new idea to David. He dwelt on it a little before he asked:

"How should you think a Roman ghost would look?"

"Oh, how should I know?" exclaimed Ambrose irritably. "I wish you'd talk about something else."

"Well," concluded David thoughtfully, "if there are any Roman ghosts about, I shouldn't think they'd like to see us digging up their things."

The Camp reached, they stood still a moment gravely surveying it. It was formed by two low banks of turf, one within the other, almost complete circles, but broken here and there; the tall, black fir-trees stood near like sentinels on guard.

Ambrose dropped the pickaxe off his shoulder with a sigh of relief and sat down by it on the ground. He felt strangely indifferent to beginning the search now that he was really here, and might dig as long as he liked without anyone to say him nay. David's remarks about ghosts had not made him more at his ease. Ghosts were all very well when you were safe at home, with well-known people and things all round you; but here, on this lonely Common, no subject could have been worse chosen. It was stupid of David. He sat beside his pickaxe feeling more creepy and nervous and uncomfortable every moment, until David, who had been carefully examining the inclosed space, struck his spade firmly on a certain spot and exclaimed:

"Here's a good place to begin!"

"Why?" asked Ambrose moodily, without moving.

"It looks," said David, kneeling down to see more closely, "as if it had been dug up before."

"Well, then," returned Ambrose, "it wouldn't be a good place, because they'll have found all the things."

It was a bare spot in one side of the bank where there was no turf, and the earth looked loose and crumbling. David rose and struck his spade into it.

"You try somewhere else," he said, "I mean to dig here."

A little roused by this example Ambrose took up the heavy pickaxe again and went over to David's side. He was making a good deep hole, but it was very narrow because his spade was so small.

"Wait a minute," said Ambrose, "let me have a go at it."

He raised up the pickaxe with all his strength, down it came, and stuck so fast that he and David together could hardly get it out again. But when it was dislodged they found it had done good service, for it broke up the earth all round the hole, so that they could now get both their spades into it and work away together. For some minutes they went on in silence, David with even steady strokes and Ambrose with feverishly quick ones. Nothing came to light but little round stones and chalky mould, not even a coin or a bone!

"I believe this isn't a good place," said Ambrose hopelessly, resting on his spade, "let's try somewhere else."

Just as he spoke David's spade struck against something with a sharp clinking sound.

"What's that?" exclaimed Ambrose.

All his excitement returning he threw himself on the ground and scratched away the earth with his hands.

"Wait a moment!" he cried; "don't dig. I see something shining."

"What's it like?" asked David breathlessly. He could see nothing, for Ambrose had thrust his head right into the hole. He presently withdrew it, and looked up at David nearly choking and almost speechless with eagerness.

"I don't know yet," he managed to say, "we must get the earth away from it."

He scooped up handful after handful, and David, sitting on his heels, watched the operations with deep solemnity. He could see a bit of this mysterious object now, and presently he remarked:

"I believe it's only a bit of broken china."

"Nonsense!" said Ambrose hoarsely. His face was scarlet; he could hardly speak. Ghosts, robbers, and all other terrors forgotten, his whole soul was bent on unearthing this long-dreamed-of treasure.

"I can feel it," he said at last. "I can get my fingers round it. But it sticks fast."

"Take my knife," said David, producing a stout weapon from his pocket.

Ambrose gently eased away the earth round the unknown object. Trembling with triumph he extracted it from its bed and raised it on high:

"Broken china indeed!" he exclaimed scornfully.

It was a small earthenware crock of quaint shape with two very tiny handles or ears, and so incrustated with mould that only here and there you could see that it was of a deep-red colour. The top was covered by a lid.

Ambrose laid it on the grass between himself and David, and both the boys surveyed it with awe. They had really made a discovery in Rumborough Camp!

"Do you suppose it's Roman?" said David at last, drawing a long breath and speaking very softly.

"What else should it be?" said Ambrose. He scraped away some of the earth clinging to the jar, touching it reverently as though it were a sacred object. "It's just as Roman as it can be. Look at the shape!"

"It's something like the pot Miss Unity sent us the honey in last summer," said David, with his eyes fixed on the crock.

"Nonsense!" said Ambrose sharply. "I tell you it's an antique. Why, I saw rows and rows like it in the museum at Nearminster. How stupid you are!" He spoke with some heat. David, on his side, did not like to be treated with scorn, which he felt he had not deserved.

"I found it," he said quietly, "I was digging."

"I got it out," said Ambrose, still bending over the treasure.

"You'd have given up digging without me," persisted David. "It's just as much mine as yours."

"Well, anyhow, we settled to go halves in all we found," said Ambrose, "and you wouldn't have known it was valuable without me. A honey-pot indeed!"

He laughed jeeringly.

David was becoming more and more hurt in his mind. He sat looking sulkily at the antique, and when Ambrose laughed he had half a mind to take up his spade and smash it. Instead of this he suddenly put out his hand, took off the lid, and felt inside it. His fingers touched something cold.

"There's money in it!" he exclaimed. "Oh, Ambrose, look!"

On his outstretched palm there glittered three bright golden pieces.

"Coins?" said Ambrose, looking impressively at his brother.

He took one in his hand and examined it carefully, turning it over and over. There was a head on it, and some queer figures he could not understand, but he knew they were numbers.

"I told you it was Roman," he said; "here's a date in Roman figures."

"What is it?" asked David.

Unfortunately Ambrose could not tell. There was a v and an x, and a great many straight strokes, but he had no idea what they represented. He sat, puzzling over it with a deep frown.

"They look just like sovereigns, don't they?" said the matter-of-fact David; "and I thought old coins were never bright. They're generally all green and brown and ugly."

"Well," said Ambrose, putting the pieces of money back into the crock; "we've got some splendid things for the museum at last. Aren't you glad we came?"

David had not quite recovered his temper. He felt that it ought to be more thoroughly understood that it was he who had made both the discoveries; then he should be satisfied. But he could not bear Ambrose to take this tone of superiority. As they picked up their tools and prepared to start homewards he said, "I should think you're glad I came, because I found the pot, and the money too."

"You ought to say 'coins,' not 'money,'" said Ambrose loftily.

It is sad to record that, before they were half-way home, the partners had fallen into open dispute over their booty. David wished to carry it; Ambrose refused; wrangling followed for the rest of the way, and when they stole guiltily in at the vicarage

gate David was in tears, and Ambrose flushed and angry. No one was in the garden to notice their return, and, having replaced the tools, the crock was carried upstairs hidden in the breast of Ambrose's tunic. In the passage they met Nurse.

"You've been out early, Master Ambrose," was all she said, and passed on, unsuspecting.

So far the adventure had been attended with golden success at every step, yet, strange to say, it had not brought much pleasure with it. There was the crock of gold certainly in the museum upstairs; but there was also a load on the boys' minds which hindered all enjoyment of it. How could they display it to their mother when it was the price of disobedience?

Chapter Three.

Cheddington Fair.

Meanwhile Pennie's plan did not make much progress. The china-house on the school-room mantel-piece stood ready for contributions, with the slit in its roof and the label on its front door; it looked very well outside, but she feared that it was poorly furnished within, though she dropped all her own money into it with great regularity. This fear became certainty soon, for Dickie came to her one day with a penny clasped in her fat hand, and said:

"Dickie will put it into the house."

Pennie hesitated, for she knew it was the price of real hard work.

"Does Dickie really want to give it?" she asked.

Dickie nodded, gazing up at the money-box with large solemn eyes.

"You're sure you wouldn't rather buy hard-bake?" persisted Pennie.

Dickie was quite sure. Her mind was bent on dropping the penny into the slit. When, however, the china-house was lifted down, and she saw her money disappear through the roof for ever, she burst into sobs and tears, and refused comfort till the

box was opened and the money returned. In this way Pennie became aware of the very low state of the funds; there was indeed hardly anything beside her own contributions, and at this rate Miss Unity would never get her new mandarin. So far her plan had failed.

"If only I could earn some money!" she said to Nancy.

"P'r'aps father will want some sermons copied when he comes back," suggested Nancy, "or mother may want some dusters hemmed."

"I should love to do the sermons," said Pennie; "but, oh," with a face of disgust, "how I do hate needlework!"

"Well," said Nancy composedly, "if people want to be paid they've got to work, whether they like it or not."

"But there's nice work and nasty work," said Pennie; "now, to write books—that must be splendid!"

"I should hate it," said Nancy. "I'd much rather dig potatoes, or make chairs and tables."

"Girls can't do that sort of work," remarked Ambrose, who was sitting in the window-seat with a book. "Girls can't do many things. They're not brave enough, or strong enough, or clever enough. Boys and men earn money, not girls."

Nancy never wasted words on Ambrose when he talked in this way. She at once looked round for the nearest thing to throw at him. Quite aware of her intention, he quickly added holding up one arm to shield himself:

"Boys can do everything better than girls."

The school-room ruler whizzed through the air, and, without touching Ambrose, crashed through the window behind him.

"Girls can't even throw straight!" he exclaimed exultingly, jumping down from the window-seat.

With a very sober face Nancy advanced to examine the mischief. The ruler had broken one pane of glass, and cracked two others right across.

"There, you see!" said Ambrose tauntingly, "you've done it again. You're always smashing things."

It was quite true. Nancy had a most unfortunate faculty for breaking glass, china, and any other fragile thing she came near. She looked sadly at the window.

"It'll be at least two weeks' pocket-money, Nancy," said Pennie, drawing near.

"I don't so much mind about that," said poor Nancy dejectedly; "but I do so hate telling mother I've broken something else. I did mean not to break anything while she was away this time."

"Mother's never really angry when we tell her," said Pennie, trying to give comfort.

"I wish someone else had broken something, or done something wrong," continued Nancy. "It's so horrid to be the only one."

Ambrose became suddenly grave. What was a broken window compared with his and David's disobedience in the matter of Rumborough Common? Each day the possession of that little crock with its gold pieces weighed upon his mind more heavily. They had not even dared to place it openly in the museum, but after hiding it for a while in the tool-house, had agreed to bury it in the garden as the only secure place. It might just as well, therefore, have remained in the Roman Camp; and with all his heart Ambrose wished it could be transported there again, for he had not known one happy minute since its discovery. It haunted him in lesson and play-hours, and visited him in feverish dreams at night; but, most of all, it spoilt his enjoyment of the garden. He got into a way of hovering round the spot where it was buried, and keeping a watchful eye on all Andrew's movements, for he felt that he might some day be seized by a whim to dig just there, and bring the dreadful thing to light. The only person he could talk to on the subject was David, but there was little comfort in that, for the conversation was sure to end in a quarrel. David had been excited and pleased at first; but now that the treasure was buried away, quite out of his sight, his interest in it became fainter and fainter.

"I don't see any good at all in it," he said; "the museum's just as empty as it was before. I think we'd better break it all up into tiny bits and throw it away."

"But the coins—" said Ambrose.

"Well, then," was David's next suggestion, "we'd better tell."

"If ever you dare to be so mean as that, I'll never speak to you or play with you again," returned Ambrose. "So there!"

David looked very sulky.

"I hate having it in my garden," he said. "I'm always wanting to plant things just where it is."

Disputes became so frequent between the boys that at length, by a silent agreement, they avoided the subject altogether, and by degrees the crock ceased to be so constantly in Ambrose's thoughts. But even when he had managed to forget it entirely for a little while, something always happened to bring it back to his memory, and this was the case after Nancy had made her confession of the broken window.

"My dear Nancy," said Mrs Hawthorne when she was told of it, "you knew it was wrong to throw things at your brother, didn't you?"

"Why, yes, mother," said Nancy; "but I didn't think of it till after the window was broken."

"But it would have been just as wrong if the ruler had not hit anyone or broken anything. The wrong thing was the feeling which made you throw it."

"I shouldn't have minded so much, though," said Nancy, "if it hadn't hit anything."

"I suppose not; and the next time you were vexed you would have been still readier to throw something. Each wrong thing makes it easier to do the next, and sometimes people go on until it comes to be more natural to do wrong than right. But when they find that the wrong-doing gets them into trouble, and gives them pain, they remember to stop in time when they are most tempted. So it is not altogether a pity that the window is broken."

"There are two panes," said Nancy, "it'll take three weeks' pocket-money. You couldn't ask Mr Putney to put in very cheap glass, could you, mother?"

Ambrose had listened attentively to all this, though he was apparently deeply engaged in scooping out a boat with his penknife. It brought all his old trouble about the crock back again with redoubled force. He envied Nancy. Her fault was confessed and paid for. What was the loss of three weeks'

money compared with the possession of unlawfully got and hidden treasure? And yet he felt it impossible to tell his mother that he had not only disobeyed her, but persuaded David to do so also. No. The crock must take its chance of discovery. Perhaps in a little while he should be able to forget its existence altogether and be quite happy again.

But it was not easy, and, as if on purpose to prevent it, Pennie's stories had just now taken the direction of dire and dreadful subjects. They varied a good deal at different times, and depended on the sort of books she could get to read. After a visit to Nearminster, where Miss Unity's library consisted of rows and rows of solemn old brown volumes, Pennie's stories were chiefly religious and biographical, taken, with additional touches of her own, from the lives of bygone worthies. When she was at home, where she had read all the books in the school-room over and over again, she had to fall back on her own invention; and then the stories were full of fairies, goblins, dwarfs, and such like fancies. But lately, peering over the shelves in her father's study, where she was never allowed to touch a book without asking, she had discovered a thick old volume called *Hone's Miscellany*. To her great joy she was allowed to look at it, "although," her father added, "I don't think even you, Pennie, will find much that is interesting in it."

Pennie had soon dived into the inmost recesses of the *Miscellany*, where she found much that was interesting and much that she did not understand. There were all sorts of queer things in it. Anecdotes of celebrated misers, maxims and proverbs, legends and pieces of poetry, receipts for making pickles and jams, all mixed up together, so that you could never tell what you might find on the next page. She thought it a most wonderful and attractive book, and picked out a store of facts and fancies on which to build future stories.

Unfortunately for Ambrose, those which most attracted her were of a dark and grim character. One poem, called "*The Dream of Eugene Aram*," so thrilled and excited her that she learned it at once by heart and repeated it to her brothers and sisters. It would have had a great effect upon Ambrose at any time, but just now he saw a dreadful fitness in it to his own secret. Pennie added a moral when she had finished, which really seemed pointed directly at him.

"We learn by this," she said, "that it is of no use to hide anything, because it is always found out; and that if we do wrong we are sure to be punished."

Pennie was fond of morals, and they were always listened to with respect, except when they came into Dickie's stories, who could not bear them, and always knew when they were coming. At the least hint of their approach, however artfully contrived, she would abruptly leave her seat and run away, saying, "No more, no more." Ambrose, however, was deeply impressed both by the poem and the moral, and felt quite as guilty as Eugene Aram.

True, it was only a crock he had buried, and as far as he knew he had not robbed anyone of the gold, except the ancient Romans, who were all dead long ago. But he began to be troubled with doubts as to whether the coins were really so old. David had said they looked bright and new; perhaps they belonged to someone alive now, who had buried them in Rumborough Camp for safety. If this were so, he and David were robbers! There was no other name for them.

This was such a new and terrible idea that he felt unable to keep it entirely to himself. He must have someone's opinion on the matter; and after some thought he resolved to try if Pennie could be of any service. "If I say, 'Suppose So-and-so did so-and-so,'" he said to himself, "she won't know it really happened, and I shall hear what she thinks. I'll do it to-morrow on the way to Cheddington Fair."

For the time for Cheddington Fair had come round again, and as it was the only entertainment of any kind that happened near Easney, it was looked forward to for weeks beforehand, and remembered for weeks afterwards. It was indeed an occasion of importance to all the country-side, and was considered the best fair held for many miles round. The first day was given up to the buying and selling of cattle, and after that came two days of what was called the "pleasure fair," when all the booths and shows were open, and many wonderful sights were to be seen.

There was a wild-beast show of unusual size, a splendid circus, numbers of conjurers, places where you might fire off a rifle for a penny, merry-go-rounds where you might choose the colour of your horse, Aunt Sallys where you could win a cocoa-nut if you were skilful—no end to the attractions, no limit to the brilliancy and bustle of the scene. The gingerbread to be bought at Cheddington Fair had a peculiar excellence of its own, whether in the form of gilded kings and queens, brandy-snap, or cakes; everything else tasted tame and flat after it, as indeed did most of the events of daily life for some days following these exciting events.

The children were glad when it was settled this year that they were to go on the first day of the pleasure fair, for they had an uneasy fear that if they waited till the second all the best things would be bought from the stalls and booths. They set out therefore in very good spirits, under the care of Nurse, and Jane the nursery-maid, to walk from Easney to Cheddington, which was about a mile.

Pennie did not join in the chatter and laughter at first: she walked along with unusual soberness, for though she liked going to the fair quite as much as the others, she had just now something to think about which made her grave. The children, she reflected, would certainly spend every penny of their money to-day, besides that which mother had given them for the wild-beast show. There would be nothing at all for the mandarin. Should she make up her mind to save all hers, and buy nothing at all for herself? As she gradually resolved upon this, she began to feel that it would certainly be a very unselfish thing to do, and she held her head a little higher, and listened with superiority to her brothers and sisters as they chattered on about their money.

"I haven't got much," said Nancy, "hardly anything really, because I've got to pay for that horrid window."

"I expect David's got most," said Ambrose, "he's as rich as a Jew."

"Jews aren't always rich," remarked David slowly. "Look at Mr Levi, who stands in the door of the rag-and-bone shop at Nearminster."

Pennie could not help striking in at this point. "He doesn't look rich," she said, "but I dare say he's got hoards buried in his garden."

"He hasn't got a garden," objected Nancy.

"Well, then, in his chimney, or perhaps sewn up in his mattress," she answered.

"If that's all he does with it he might just as well be poor," said David.

"But he isn't a poor man for all that," said Nancy, "if he's got a mattress full of gold."

Ambrose became silent as the dispute about the poverty or wealth of Mr Levi proceeded, and presently, edging close up to Pennie, who was a little behind the others, he said wistfully:

"I say, Pennie, I want to ask you something."

"Well," said his sister rather unwillingly. "Suppose—you found something," began Ambrose with an effort.

"What sort of thing?"

"Oh, something valuable," said Ambrose, thinking of the glittering gold coins.

"What then?" asked Pennie, looking at him with a little more interest.

"What would you do with it?" continued Ambrose earnestly.

"Do with it!" repeated his sister. "Why, I should give it back to the person who lost it, of course."

"But suppose you couldn't find out who it belonged to, or suppose the people were dead."

Pennie was tired of supposing.

"Oh! I should ask mother what to do," she said, dismissing the question. "I can hear the band," she suddenly added.

Ambrose gave a little sigh, as all the children quickened their footsteps at this welcome sound.

There was no advice to be got from Pennie. He must shake off the thought of his tiresome secret and enjoy himself as much as he could to-day. Afterwards there would be time to trouble about it. And now they were getting quite near to the tents and flags and gaily-painted caravans and confused noises of men and beasts. Nurse seized Dickie's unwilling hand as they reached the turnstile which admitted them into the field.

"Keep close together, my dears," she said anxiously. "You stay along with me, Miss Pennie, and Miss Nancy and Jane, you come after me with the other two."

She looked distractedly at the little faces smiling with delight and eager to plunge into the pleasures of the fair. Since Dickie

had once run away quite alone to go to the circus she had always been more nervous about the children.

"Jane," she said sharply to the small nursery-maid, "what are you gaping at? Keep your wits about you, do."

Jane, who had never been inside a fair before, was gazing open-mouthed at an enormous portrait of the "Living Skeleton." She turned to Nurse with a face from which all expression had gone but one of intense surprise.

"You're not a bit of use," said Nurse. "See here, Master David, I can depend on *you*. Keep with Master Ambrose and Jane as close to me as you can. And if you lose sight of me in the crowd be at the gate by four o'clock and wait there for the carriage."

David nodded, and Nurse, with one more severe look at Jane, plunged into the crowd with Dickie toddling beside her.

How gay, how enchanting it all was! Boom, boom went the drums. "Walk in, ladies and gentlemen. Here you will see the performing seal, the Circassian beauty, the Chinese giant, and the smallest dwarf in the world." Next to those attractions came the circus, outside of which, on a raised platform, stood harlequin, clown, and columbine, all in a row, and in full dress.

"Here we are again," cried the clown. "How are you tomorrow?"

How kind and inviting all the showmen were! Bang! Bang! "Two shots with a rifle for a penny. Who'll win a cocoa-nut?" "This way for Signor Antonio, the famous lion-tamer!" And so on, till the brain reeled, and choice amongst all these excitements became almost impossible.

Mother had given money for one entertainment, and the children had agreed beforehand that the wild-beast show would be far the best to see, but now that they were in the midst of the fair they began to waver. It was painful to think that whichever entertainment they fixed on the others might be better. On one point Nurse was firm. Wherever they went they must all go together, and at last, after a harassing consultation and some difference of opinion, it was decided that on the whole the menagerie would be best.

"Though I did want," said David, rather regretfully, as they entered, "to see that performing pig who knows his letters and dances a hornpipe."

The wild-beast show over, there remained a great deal to be seen outside; and now in the bustle and struggle of the narrow ways the party became separated, the three little girls remaining with Nurse and the boys with Jane.

"And I hope to goodness," said Nurse anxiously, "that Jane won't lose her head. Master David's there—that's one comfort. No, Miss Dickie, you don't let go of my hand for one minute, so it's no good pulling at me."

Up till now Pennie had had no difficulty in keeping her money in her pocket, for she had seen nothing she specially wanted to buy. Nancy had spent hers before she had been five minutes in the fair, had won a cocoa-nut, and was now hugging it triumphantly under her arm. No doubt Ambrose and David would also part with theirs before long.

"There's a funny stall," said Nancy suddenly, "nothing but rubbishing old books."

"Let's go and look at it," said Pennie.

They were very shabby old books indeed. Some of them with cracked bindings and the letters on the backs rubbed off; others with no binding at all, in soiled paper covers. There were piles and piles of them, not neatly arranged, but tossed about anyhow, and behind the stall stood an old man with a withered face and a pointed chin—a sort of wizard old man, Pennie thought. Nancy seemed struck with his appearance too.

"He's just like pantaloon, isn't he?" she said in a loud whisper as they stopped in front of the stall.

The old man peered sharply at the two little girls over the open book he held in his hand.

"What do you want, Missie?" he asked in a cracked voice.

"We don't want anything, thank you," said Pennie politely. "What a lot of old books you have!"

"Ah! they're too old for such as you," said the old man, glancing at the watchful form of Nurse in the background; "but I've got a pretty one somewheres that'd just suit you."

"Come along, do, Miss Pennie," said Nurse entreatingly, "there's nothing like old books for fevers."

But the old man had dived beneath his stall, and now produced a book on which Pennie's eyes were immediately fastened with the deepest interest.

"There!" he said, laying it before her, "there's the book to suit you, my little lady." It was a square book in a gaily-coloured parchment cover, somewhat faded, but still showing attractive devices of shields, swords, and dragons. On it was emblazoned in old English letters the title, "*Siegfried the Dragon Slayer*."

Pennie gazed at it in silent rapture.

"Full of 'lustrations," continued the old man slowly turning the leaves, and leaving it open to display a picture.

Pennie and Nancy both bent over it. It was a wonderful picture. There was a man with wings on his shoulders flying high up above a great city, and shooting arrows from a bow at the crowd of people beneath. How did he get wings? Who was he?

Pennie cast her eyes hurriedly on the next page to find out, but before she could master one sentence the old man turned over the leaf; "That's the book for you, Missie," he repeated, "you're a scholar, I can see that."

Much flattered, Pennie asked quickly, "Does it cost much?"

"Dirt cheap," said the old man. "I'll let *you* have it for eighteenpence."

Pennie had exactly that sum in her purse. "Do come away, Miss Pennie," said Nurse's voice behind her.

"Why don't you buy it?" said Nancy; "you won't have such a chance again."

Pennie gulped down a sort of sob. "I should love to," she said, "but I want to keep my money."

"Well, if you're not going to buy, you'd better not look at it any more," said Nancy; "I haven't got any money."

With an immense effort, and a parting glance full of affection at "*Siegfried the Dragon Slayer*," Pennie turned away from the stall, much to Nurse's relief. Soon the old man and his books were lost to sight, but they remained very clearly and distinctly in Pennie's mind. She saw the picture of that flying man more vividly than all that was going on round her, and would have

given worlds to be acquainted with his history. If only she had more money, enough to buy the book and the mandarin too!

Then she began to wonder how the boys had spent theirs. No doubt they had bought just what had taken their fancy, and she would be the only one to go back empty-handed. It was a little hard. The only drop of comfort in it was that she would be able to tell them what a real sacrifice she had made. Yesterday she had seen David writing ten times over in his copy-book, "*Virtue is its own reward.*" If that meant feeling good, better than other people, Pennie had no doubt she was tasting the reward of virtue now, and it consoled her not a little for the loss of "*Siegfried the Dragon Slayer.*"

It was now nearly four o'clock, and Nurse was not sorry to turn towards the entrance, where Andrew was to wait with the carriage, and where she hoped to join the boys and Jane.

"They're there already," cried Nancy as they approached the turnstile, bobbing her head from side to side to see through the crowd, "and oh! what *has* David got?"

Nurse groaned.

"Something he oughtn't to have, I make sure," she said.

"It's something alive!" exclaimed Nancy, giving a leap of delight as they got nearer, "I can see it move. Whatever is it?"

David was standing as still as a sentinel with his back against the gate-post and a look of triumph on his face, clutching firmly to his breast a small jet-black kitten. It was mewling piteously, with some reason—for in his determination not to let it go, he gripped it hard, so that it was spread out flat and could hardly breathe. The children gathered round him in an ecstasy.

"What a little black love!" exclaimed Nancy; "where did you get it?"

"I saved its life," was all David answered as Nurse packed them all into the waggonette.

"I helped," said Ambrose.

It was not until they were fairly on their way and had shaken down into something like composure, that the history of the kitten could be told. It then appeared that David and Ambrose had heard feeble cries proceeding from a retired corner behind

a caravan. They had at once left Jane, and gone to see what it was.

Finding two gypsy boys about to hang a black kitten, they had offered them sixpence to let it go, at which they had only laughed. The price had then risen to two shillings besides all the marbles Ambrose had in his pocket, and this being paid David had seized the kitten, and here it was.

"And so," said Pennie, "you've both spent every bit of your money."

"We couldn't let them hang the kitten, you see," remarked Ambrose.

At another time Pennie would have been the first to agree to this, and to feel interested in the rescue of the kitten; but now she was so full of her own good deed, that she only said coldly:

"It wasn't worth nearly all that. Why, you can get a kitten for nothing—anywhere."

David, still grasping his treasure, stared at her solemnly, for this speech was strangely unlike Pennie.

"What did you buy?" he asked.

The moment had come. Pennie looked round her with conscious virtue as she replied, "I saw a book I wanted very much, quite as much as you wanted the kitten, but I saved all my money for the mandarin."

"How stupid!" said Ambrose.

"It's much better to save someone's life than to buy a mandarin," said David.

Pennie felt hurt and disappointed; the reward of virtue was not supporting under these circumstances. She wanted a word of praise or admiration. If someone had only said, "That was good of you," she would have been satisfied; but no one seemed even surprised at what she had done. And yet how much she would have liked to buy Siegfried! The boys had the kitten; Nancy had her cocoa-nut, even Dickie was clasping a rabbit on a green stand, and a gingerbread man. Pennie alone had brought nothing home from the fair; she was very sorry for herself.

A sudden outburst from Dickie roused her, as she sat sad and silent in the midst of chatter and laughter. No one could make out at first what was the matter, and Dickie could not tell them: she only kicked out her fat little legs and sobbed more convulsively at every fresh attempt to comfort her. But at last she managed to make them understand that her gingerbread man was spoilt; she had eaten his head, and he would never, never be whole again. This was followed by a torrent of tears, for Dickie never did anything by halves, and when she cried she put her whole heart into it.

"Bless the child, she'll make herself ill," said Nurse, taking her upon her knee. "Now, Dickie, my dear, don't give way. You know you can stop if you like. Look at your pretty rabbit!"

Dickie dealt the offered rabbit a blow on the nose with her doubled fist.

She did not want the rabbit, she sobbed out, but she thought she could stop if she had the black kitten to hold. To this David had a decided objection. It was his kitten, and if Dickie had it she would let it go. Fresh screams from Dickie.

"Lor, Master David," said Nurse in despair, "let her have it, do. I'll take care it don't get away."

Peace was somewhat restored after Dickie had been allowed to stroke the kitten on Nurse's lap; but it was not a cheerful carriageful that arrived shortly afterwards at the Vicarage, every one seemed to have something to grumble at and be injured about.

"I'm thankful to be home," said Nurse to Jane as they went upstairs. "I'd rather anyday have a week's work than an afternoon's pleasure."

As for Pennie, she dropped her money into the china-house, and went to bed that night with the feelings of a martyr. She would not give up her plan, but she was now beginning to see that it was a failure. No one showed any real interest in it—no one except herself was willing to sacrifice anything in the cause. It was certainly lonely and uncomfortable to stand so high above other people.

Chapter Four.

"Kettles."

Pennie was haunted for days after the fair by the bright pages of "*Siegfried the Dragon Slayer*," for she became more and more conscious that she had made a useless sacrifice. She might just as well have bought it, she sadly reflected; none of the others seemed the least likely to help her in her plan, and certainly she could not carry it out alone. The more she thought of it the more injured and disappointed she felt. It was certainly a good plan, and it was certainly right to sacrifice one's self; of those two things she was sure, and it both hurt and surprised her to be unable to impress this on her brothers and sisters. Pennie was used to command, and accustomed to success in most of her little schemes, and it seemed hard to be deserted in this way. She stood on a lonely height of virtue, conscious of setting a good example of generosity; but it was not a cheerful position, and, besides, no one seemed to notice it, which was vexatious and trying. This made her by turns condescending and cross, so that she was neither so happy herself nor so pleasant a companion as she had been.

"I can't think why you're so disagreeable," said Nancy at last. "If it's because you've put all your money into the box, I wish you'd take it out again and be as you were before."

"You don't understand," said Pennie, "you never give up anything."

"Yes, I do," replied Nancy quickly, "I've given up three weeks' money for that broken window."

"That wasn't sacrifice," answered Pennie; "you *had* to do that. Sacrifice means giving up something you like for the sake of other people."

"Well, if it makes you cross and tiresome I wish you wouldn't sacrifice things," replied Nancy; "I don't see the good of it. Do you know," she added, seizing hold of David's black kitten, "that mother says we may go and see old Nurse?"

Pennie's brow cleared at once, the peevish look left her face.

"Oh, when?" she exclaimed joyfully.

"This afternoon," said Nancy. "Mother's going to drive into Nearminster, and leave us at the College while she goes to see Miss Unity. Isn't it jolly?"

"I suppose we shall have tea with Nurse," said Pennie; "but," she added, "I hope Dickie isn't to go this time. She does spoil everything so."

"Only you and me," said Nancy, rolling the kitten tightly up in a newspaper so that only its head appeared. "Doesn't it look like a mummy cat? There's one just like it at Nearminster. It would do for the boys' museum."

"It wouldn't stay there long," said Pennie, as the kitten writhed and wriggled itself out of the paper. "I am real glad we're going to see old Nurse."

"Do you like going in winter or summer best?" asked Nancy.

"Oh, I don't know!" said Pennie. "I like both. But I think perhaps it looks nicer in summer, because you see the flowers are in bloom and the old people are sitting on the benches, and all that."

"I like winter best," said Nancy, "because of making the toast."

All the year round a visit to old Nurse was one of the children's greatest pleasures, but it was specially so to Pennie. She now felt quite cheerful and happy in the prospect, not only because she was very fond of her, but because she lived in such an extremely delightful and interesting place. For Mrs Margetts, who had been Mrs Hawthorne's nurse when she was a child, had now left service for many years and taken up her abode in the almshouse at Nearminster, or The College as it was called. Next to the cathedral Pennie thought it the nicest place she had ever seen, and there was something most attractive to her in its low-arched massive doors, its lattice windows with their small leaded panes, and its little old chapel where the pensioners had a service and a chaplain all to themselves.

The College was built in the form of a quadrangle, one side of which faced the High Street, so that though they were snugly sheltered within from noise and turmoil, the inmates could still look out upon the busy life they had quitted. As you passed the entrance you caught glimpses of bright green turf, of trim borders of flowers, of neat gravel paths and quaint old figures standing about, or sitting on stone benches against the walls. Over it all rested the air of peace and stillness. It was a place where neither hope nor fear, labour nor struggle could come. These were left outside in the troublesome world, and all who entered here had nothing more to do with them. They might sit in the sun with folded hands, talk over their past hardships,

grumble a little at their present aches and pains, gossip a great deal, and so get gently nearer and nearer to the deepest rest of all.

The bishop, who had founded the College long ago, still stood carved in stone over the doorway, crozier in hand, watching the many generations of weary old souls who crept in at his gate for refuge. Pennie thought he had an expression of calm severity, as if he knew how ungrateful many of them were for his bounty, how they grumbled at the smallness of the rooms, the darkness of the windows, and the few conveniences for cooking. It must be hard for him to hear all those murmurs after he had done so much for them; but he had at any rate no want of gratitude to complain of in old Nurse, who was as proud of her two tiny rooms as though they had been a palace.

Mrs Margetts was in all matters disposed to think herself one of the most fortunate people upon earth. For instance, to be settled so near her dear "Miss Mary," as she still called Mrs Hawthorne, and to have the pleasure of visits from the little "ladies and gentlemen," was enough to fill anyone's heart with thankfulness. What could she want more? She was indeed highly favoured beyond all desert. Other people may have thought that a life of faithful service and unselfish devotion to the interests of her employers had well earned the reward of a few quiet years at its end. But old Nurse did not look upon her good fortune as due to any merits of her own, but to the extraordinary kindness and generosity of others, so that she was in a constant state of surprise at their thoughtfulness and affection.

Not less did she cherish and respect the memory of the days which came before Mrs Hawthorne's marriage, and this was what the children liked best to hear. Stories of Miss Mary, Master Charles, Miss Prissy, and the rest, who were now all grown-up people, never became wearisome, and certainly Nurse was never tired of telling them. Her listeners knew them almost by heart, and if by any chance she missed some small detail, it was at once demanded with a sense of injury.

Pennie, in particular, drank in her words eagerly, and would sit entranced gazing with an ever-new interest at the relics of the "family" with which the little room was filled. Hanging by the fireplace was a very faded kettle-holder, worked in pink and green wool by Miss Mary, now Mrs Hawthorne; on the mantel-piece a photograph of a family group, in which Miss Mary appeared at the age of ten in a plaid poplin frock, low in the

neck and short in the sleeves, with her hair in curls; on each side of her stood a brother with a grave face and a short jacket.

There was a great deal to be told about this picture. Nurse remembered, she said, as if it was yesterday, the day it was "took." Master Owen had a swollen cheek, and had cried and said he did not want his picture done, but he had been promised a pop-gun if he stood still, and had then submitted. And that was why he stood side-face in the photograph, while Master Charles faced you. It was almost past belief to Pennie and Nancy that Uncle Owen, who was now a tall man with a long beard, had ever been that same puffy-cheeked little boy, bribed to stand-still by a pop-gun.

There were also on the mantel-piece two white lions or "monsters," as Nurse called them, presented by Miss Prissy, and quite a number of small ornaments given from time to time by the Hawthorne children themselves. But perhaps the crowning glory of Nurse's room was a sampler worked by herself when a girl. Pennie looked at this with an almost fearful admiration, for the number of tiny stitches in it were terrible to think of. "I'm glad people don't have to work samplers now," she often said. This was indeed a most wonderful sampler, and it hung against the wall framed and glazed as it well deserved, a lasting example of industry and eyesight. At the top sat the prophet Elijah under a small green bush receiving the ravens, who carried in their beaks neat white bundles of food. Next came the alphabet, all the big letters first, and then a row of small ones. Then the Roman numerals up to a hundred, then a verse of poetry:—

"Time like an ever-rolling stream
Bears all its sons away,
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the break of day."

And then Nurse's name, "Kezia Margetts," and the date when this great work was completed.

Dickie's favourite amongst all Nurse's curious possessions was what she called her "weather-house," a building of cardboard covered with some gritty substance which sparkled. The weather-house had two little doors, out of one of which appeared an old woman when it was fine, and out of the other an old man when it was going to be wet. They had become rather uncertain, however, in their actions, because Dickie had so often banged the naughty old man to make him go in,

supposing him to have a bad influence on the weather. Nurse spoiled Dickie dreadfully, the other children considered, and they were pleased when she did not make one of the party.

"I suppose Nurse knows we're coming?" said Pennie, as they were driving from Miss Unity's house, where they had left their mother, to the College.

"Of course," replied Nancy; "you know we never take her by surprise, because she always likes to get something for tea."

"I don't think surprises are nice," said Pennie. "I like to have lots of time to look forward to a thing. That's the best part."

"I like to surprise other people though," said Nancy; "it's great fun, I think. Here we are!"

There were no old people standing about in the garden, and all the benches were empty, for it was a chilly autumn afternoon. As the children crossed the quadrangle they saw here and there, through the latticed panes, the cheerful glow of a fire.

"It must be very nice to be an old woman and live here," said Pennie.

"Well, I don't know," said Nancy. "How would you like to be Mrs Crump?"

Mrs Crump was a discontented old lady who lived in the room beneath Nurse. For some reason Nancy took a deep interest in her, and even in the middle of Nurse's best stories she was always on the alert for the least sound of the sharp complaining tones below.

"Oh, of course not!" said Pennie hastily; "I mean some contented, good-natured old woman."

"Mrs Crump says," continued Nancy, "that she never knew what it was to be quick in her temper till she felt the want of an oven. She thinks it's the baker's bread that makes her cross. She turns against it, and that makes her speak sharp."

"She's a tiresome old woman," said Pennie, "and I can't make out why you like to hear about her, or talk to her. Let's go up softly, else she'll come out."

"I should like her to," said Nancy as the little girls climbed the steep carpeted stairs which led up to Nurse's room. "She's just like an old witch woman."

The children were warmly received by Nurse, who was waiting for them with all her preparations made. A snug round tea-table, with a bunch of chrysanthemums in the middle, a kettle hissing hospitably on the hob, and something covered up hot in the fender. She herself was arrayed in her best cap, her black silk gown, and her most beaming smiles of welcome.

"It's my turn to make the toast," said Nancy, pulling off her gloves briskly. "You've got a lovely fire. You cut the bread, Pennie. Thick."

"And how's Miss Dickie?" said Nurse, watching these preparations with a delighted face. "Bless her dear little heart, I haven't seen her this long while."

"She wanted to come," said Pennie, "but she's got a cold, so mother wouldn't let her."

"A little dear," repeated Nurse. She sat with her hands folded on her waist, turning her kind round face first on Pennie and then on Nancy, who, kneeling on the hearth, was making toast in a business-like serious manner.

"How's Mrs Crump?" inquired the latter.

"Well, she's rather contrairy in her temper just now, my dear," answered Nurse.

"She always is, isn't she?" returned Nancy.

"I can't altogether deny that, Miss Nancy," said Nurse, chuckling comfortably; "but you see it's a constant trouble with her that her room window don't look on the street. She's been used to a deal of life before she came here, and she finds it dull, and that makes her short. When you've been used to stirring and bustling about, charing and so on, it do seem a bit quiet, I daresay."

"I should have thought," said Nancy, "that she'd have been glad to rest after all that; but I think I'd rather have a room looking on the street too. I should like watching people pass."

Pennie was sitting in her favourite place, the window-seat, where Nurse's flower-pots stood in a row—a cactus, a geranium, and some musk. She looked out into the garden.

"I think this way's much the nicest," she said, "because of the flowers and the grass, and the quietness."

"Tea's ready!" exclaimed Nancy, springing up from the fire with one scarlet cheek, and waving the last piece of toast on the top of the toasting-fork.

The little party drew in their chairs, Pennie pouring out tea, as usual on these occasions, for to her own great delight Nurse was always treated rather as a guest than hostess. By the good luck which, she considered, always attended her, she had that very morning received a present of a pot of honey, and she was pressing this on her visitors when the sound of a footstep was heard on the stairs.

"Perhaps it's Mrs Crump!" exclaimed Nancy eagerly. "If it is, do ask her to tea."

"It isn't Mrs Crump," said Pennie, listening; "it's somebody whose boots are much too big."

The steps came slowly up the steep stairs, one at a time, with evident difficulty, and then there was a timid knock at the door.

"I know who it is. You may come in, Kettles," said Nurse, raising her voice.

The door opened and Kettles came in. She was a little girl of about Nancy's age, in a tattered frock, an old shawl, and a straw bonnet hanging back from her head by the strings. Her hair fell rough and tangled over her forehead, beneath which a pair of bright grey eyes looked out half suspiciously at the company, and yet with a sort of mouse-like shrewdness, which was increased by the whole expression of her sharp little pointed face. Pennie glanced at once at her feet. She had been right. Kettles' boots were many sizes too large for her, which accounted for her difficulty in getting upstairs, and indeed everything she wore seemed to belong to a bigger and older person.

The children both stared in surprise at this little dingy figure, and Kettles returned their gaze, shifting her furtive glance from one face to the other with wonderful swiftness as she stood just inside the door, clasping a cracked china jug to her chest.

"You've come for my tea-leaves, haven't you?" said Nurse as she opened her corner cupboard and took out a basin. "How's your mother to-day?"

"She's bad," said Kettles decidedly, shutting up her mouth very tight after she had spoken.

"Is it her head again?" inquired Nurse.

"It's 'ralgy all down one side of her face—orful," said Kettles.

"Well, a cup of tea will do her good," said Nurse as she put the tea-leaves into the jug.

"Her knees is bad too," added Kettles, as if unwilling to have the matter too slightly treated.

"Ah! I don't wonder," said Nurse sympathetically, "kneeling about in the damp so much as she's forced to."

Nancy, who had noticed that Kettles' eyes were straying over the eatables on the table, here nudged Nurse with her elbow.

"Wouldn't she like some bread and honey?" she whispered.

"This little lady wants to know if you'd like some bread and honey?" repeated Nurse aloud condescendingly.

Kettles made no answer, though there was a sudden gleam in her eyes.

"Perhaps you don't like honey?" ventured Pennie slyly.

"Don't know what it is," answered Kettles. "I like bread and dripping."

"Oh, I'm sure it must be much nicer than that," said Nancy. "That doesn't sound at all nice. May I spread some for her?" she asked eagerly of Nurse.

It is doubtful if Nurse quite liked such a use made of her honey, for she thought dripping more suitable for such as Kettles, but she could not refuse Nancy anything. So she answered readily enough,—"To be sure, my dear," and made no objection; while Nancy, choosing the biggest piece of toast, proceeded to plaster it thickly with honey. When, however, these preparations being finished, she dragged up a chair and hospitably invited Kettles

to take a seat between herself and Pennie, Nurse felt it time to protest.

"Kettles had better run home now, my dear, and eat it on the way. Her mother will want her."

But there was such an outcry against this from both the girls that she had to give way, and in a moment the energetic Nancy had seated Kettles at the table, taken away her jug of tea-leaves, and placed the bread and honey before her. A strange addition certainly to Nurse's tea-party, and quite out of keeping with the fresh neatness of the other visitors, the bright ribbons in Nurse's cap, and her glistening satin apron. From her battered old bonnet to the grimy little claw in which she held her bread, there was nothing neat or fresh or bright about poor Kettles.

Nurse sat looking on at all this with very mixed feelings. She liked to give the children pleasure, and yet what could be more unsuitable than the close neighbourhood of Kettles? If Mrs Hawthorne or Miss Unity "chanced in," what would they think of finding Pennie and Nancy in such strange company? They would certainly blame Nurse for allowing it, and quite rightly too—even if Kettles had been a neat clean little girl it would not be "the thing;" but as it was, nothing could have been more unlucky than her appearance just at that time.

While these thoughts passed through Nurse's mind and completely spoilt any enjoyment of her tea, Pennie and Nancy cast sidelong glances, full of curiosity and interest, at their visitor. They were too polite to stare openly at her, and went through the form of a conversation with Nurse in order that she might feel quite at her ease. Presently, however, when she had got well on with her meal, to which she applied herself in a keen and business-like manner, Nancy could not forbear asking:

"Where do you live?"

Kettles held the slice away from her mouth just long enough to say, very quickly:

"Anchoranopally," and immediately fastened her teeth into it again.

The children looked at Nurse for an explanation.

"It's the 'Anchor and Hope Alley,' she means, my dears, turning out of the High Street just below here."

Pennie nodded seriously. She knew where the Anchor and Hope Alley was, and also that it was called the lowest quarter in Nearminster. She looked at Kettles with greater interest than ever, and longed to make some inquiries about her home and surroundings. This was so evident in her face that poor Nurse's uneasiness increased. If Kettles began to talk she might drop into language and mention details quite usual in Anchor and Hope Alley, but also quite unfit for Pennie and Nancy to hear. What was to be done? Kettles' slice of bread seemed endless, and here was Pennie on the point of speaking to her again. Nurse rushed nervously in with a question, which she repented as soon as she had put it:

"What's your father doing now, Kettles?"

"Drinkin'," answered Kettles at once. "He come home last night, and—"

"There, there, that'll do," said Nurse hastily. "We don't want to hear about that just now. You finish your tea and run home to mother."

And in spite of beseeching looks from the girls, Kettles was shortly afterwards hurried away with her jug of tea-leaves, and Nurse gave a great sigh of relief as the big boots went clumping down the stairs.

"She's far nicer than Mrs Grump," said Nancy when they were left alone with Nurse, "only you don't let her talk half enough. I wanted to ask her lots of things. Is her name really Kettles? and how did you come to know her? and why does she wear such large boots?"

It appeared that Kettles' real name was Keturah, but being, Nurse explained, a hard sort of name to say, it had got changed into Kettles. "Her mother, a decent, hard-working woman, came to the College to scrub and clean sometimes. She was very poor, and had a great many children and a bad husband." Here Nurse shook her head.

"What do you give her tea-leaves for?" asked Pennie.

"Why, my dear, when folks are too poor to buy fresh tea, they're glad enough to get it after it's been once used."

"We've enjoyed ourselves tremendously," said Nancy when, the visit nearly over, she and Pennie were putting on their hats

again, "and you'll ask Kettles to see us next time we come, won't you?"

But this Nurse would not promise. It was hard, she said, to refuse any of the dear children anything, and she was aware how little she had to give them, but she knew her duty to herself and Mrs Hawthorne. Kettles must not be asked. "To think," she concluded, "of you two young ladies sitting down to table with people out of Anchor and Hope Alley!"

"We always have tea with the children at the school feasts at home," said Nancy.

"That's quite different, my dear, in your dear papa's own parish," said Nurse.

"Are they wicked people in Anchor and Hope Alley?" asked Pennie. "Is Kettles wicked?"

"Poor little soul, no, I wouldn't say that," said Nurse. "She's a great help to her mother and does her best. But she sees things and hears things that you oughtn't to know anything about, and so she's not fit company for such as you. And now it's time to go to the gate."

As they passed Anchor and Hope Alley on their way to Miss Unity's house in the Close Pennie stretched her neck to see as far down it as she could.

"How dark and narrow it is! Fancy living there!" she said. "Don't you wonder which is Kettles' house?"

"Shouldn't you like to know," said Nancy, "what it was that her father did when he came home that night? I do so wish Nurse hadn't stopped her."

"What a nice little funny face she had!" said Pennie thoughtfully, "such bright eyes! If it was washed clean, and her hair brushed back smooth, and she had white stockings and a print frock, how do you suppose she'd look?"

"Not half so nice," said Nancy at once, "all neat and proper, just like one of the school-children at Easney."

And indeed it was her look of wildness that made Kettles attractive to Pennie and Nancy, used to the trim propriety of well-cared-for village children, who curtsied when you spoke to them, and always said "Miss." There was a freedom in the

glance of Kettles' eye and a perfect carelessness of good manners in her bearing which was as interesting as it was new.

"She's the sort of little girl who lives in a caravan and sells brushes and brooms," continued Pennie as the carriage stopped at Miss Unity's door.

Mrs Hawthorne was accustomed sometimes to read to herself during her frequent drives between Easney and Nearminster, and to-day, when the children saw that she had her book with her, they went on talking very low so as not to disturb her. The conversation was entirely about Kettles, and the subject proved so engrossing that Pennie quite forgot all her late vexations and was perfectly amiable and pleasant. It was indeed long since she and Nancy had had such a comfortable talk together, and agreed so fully in their interests. As they jogged steadily home along the well-known road, new fancies as to the details of Kettles' life and surroundings constantly occurred to them; there was even a certain pleasure in heightening all the miseries which they felt sure she had to bear.

"In the winter," said Nancy, "she has chilblains on her feet—broken ones."

Pennie shuddered. She knew what chilblains were.

"They must hurt her dreadfully," she said, "in those great, thick boots."

"And no stockings," added Nancy relentlessly.

"Oh, Nancy!" said Pennie.

She felt almost as sorry as if Nancy were telling her positive facts.

"Wouldn't it be a good thing to get one of those thick grey pairs of stockings for her out of the shop at Easney," said Nancy after a short silence, "and a pair of boots to fit?"

"I've got no money," replied Pennie shortly.

"Well, no more have I now," said Nancy; "but we could save some. You'd much better give up that stupid mandarin thing. You don't even know whether Miss Unity would like it."

Now Pennie was at heart very much attracted by the idea of supplying Kettles with comfortable stockings and boots. It was a

splendid idea, but it had one drawback—it was not her own. Her own plan had been cast aside and rejected, and she could not meekly fall in with this new one of Nancy's, however good it might be. Pennie was a kind-hearted little girl, and always ready to help others, but she liked to do it in her own way. She was fond of leading, advising, and controlling; but when it came to following counsel and taking advice herself she did not find it pleasant. Therefore, because the new mandarin was an idea of her own she was still determined to carry it through, though, in truth, she had almost lost sight of her first wish—to give Miss Unity pleasure.

So now she made no answer, and Nancy, looking eagerly at her, saw a little troubled frown instead of a face covered with smiles.

"You'll never get enough to buy it alone," she continued. "And just think how Kettles would like new boots and stockings!"

As she spoke they turned in at the Vicarage gate, and saw just in front of them a figure stepping jauntily up the drive.

"Oh!" cried Nancy. "Mother! Pennie! Look! There's Miss Barnicroft going to call."

Mrs Hawthorne roused herself at once from her book, for no one could look forward with indifference to a visit from Miss Barnicroft.

Chapter Five.

Miss Barnicroft's Money.

Not very far from the Roman camp Rumborough Common ended in a rough rutty road, or rather lane, and about half-way down this stood a small white cottage with a thatched roof. It was an ordinary labourer's cottage with the usual patch of garden, just like scores of others round about; but it possessed a strange and peculiar interest of its own, for it was not an ordinary labourer who lived there, it was Miss Barnicroft, with two dogs and a goat.

Now Miss Barnicroft was not in the least like other people, and the children considered her by far the most interesting object to be seen near Easney, so that they never passed her lonely dwelling without trying to get a glimpse of her, or at least of her

animals. They were careful, however, only to take side glances, and to look very grave if they did happen to see her, for they had been taught to regard her with respect, and on no account to smile at anything odd in her appearance or behaviour. "Poor Miss Barnicroft" she was generally called, though Andrew spoke less politely of her as the "daft lady."

In their walks with Miss Grey it was with a thrill of pleasure that they sometimes saw the well-known flighty figure approaching, for there was always something worth looking at in Miss Barnicroft. Her garments were never twice alike, so that she seemed a fresh person every time. Sometimes she draped herself in flowing black robes, with a veil tied closely over her head and round her face. At others she wore a high-crowned hat decked with gay ribbons, a short skirt, and yellow satin boots. There was endless variety in her array, but however fantastic it might be, she preserved through it all a certain air of dignity and distinction which was most impressive.

Her face, too, was delicate in feature and refined in expression. Her short upper lip had a haughty curl, and her grey eyes flickered uncertainly beneath well-marked brows. Although she was not more than middle-aged her hair was snowy white, and sometimes escaping here and there in stray locks from her head-dress, added to the strangeness of her appearance. Miss Barnicroft was indeed quite unlike other people; her very food was different, for she lived on vegetables and drank goat's milk. It was even whispered that she did not sleep in a bed, but in a hammock slung up to the ceiling.

Nothing could be more interesting than all this, but the children did not see her very often, for she went out seldom and never came to church. Occasionally, however, she paid a visit to the Vicarage, when she would ask for the vicar and carry on a very long conversation with him on all manner of subjects, darting from one to the other with most confusing speed. Mr Hawthorne did not appreciate these visits very much, but the children were always pleasantly excited by them. When, therefore, Nancy caught sight of Miss Barnicroft proceeding up the drive she abruptly left the subject of Kettles' boots and stockings, and lost no time in pointing out the visitor to her mother.

"I expect Miss Barnicroft wants to see your father," said Mrs Hawthorne.

And so indeed it proved, for by the time they reached the door Miss Barnicroft had been shown into the study, and to their great disappointment the girls saw her no more.

Ambrose, however, was more fortunate, for it chanced that afternoon that he had been excused some of his lessons on account of a headache, and at that very moment was lying flat on the hearth-rug in his father's study with a book. He was afraid, on the visitor's entrance, that he would be sent away, but was soon relieved to find that no notice was taken of him, so that he was able to see and hear all that passed. What a lucky chance! and what a lot he would have to tell the others!

At first the conversation was not interesting, for it was about some question of taxation which he did not understand; but suddenly dropping this, Miss Barnicroft began to tell a story of some white owls who lived in the keep of a castle in Scotland. Just as the point of this history was reached she dropped that too, and asked, casting a lofty and careless glance down at Ambrose:

"Is that one of your children?"

"That is my eldest boy," said the vicar. "Come and speak to Miss Barnicroft, Ambrose."

"Ah!" said Miss Barnicroft with a coldly disapproving look as Ambrose shyly advanced, "I don't like boys."

"How is that?" asked Mr Hawthorne.

"They grow to be men," she answered with a shudder, "and even while they are young there is no barbarity of which they are not capable. I could believe anything of a boy."

"Dear me!" said the vicar, smiling, "that is very severe; I hope all boys are not so bad as that!"

"It is greatly, I believe, owing to the unnatural manner in which they are fed," she continued, turning away from Ambrose. "Most wickedness comes from eating meat. Violence, and cruelty, and bloodthirstiness would vanish if men lived on fruit and vegetables."

"Do you think so?" said the vicar mildly; "but women are not as a rule cruel and bloodthirsty, and they eat meat too."

"Women are naturally better than men, and it does not do them so much harm; but they would be still better without it. It makes them selfish and gross," said Miss Barnicroft.

Mr Hawthorne never encouraged his visitor to argue long on this subject, which somehow crept into all her conversations, however far-away from it they might begin. So he merely bowed his head in silence.

Miss Barnicroft rose with an air of having settled the question, but suddenly sat down again and said with a short laugh:

"By the way, you have thieves in your parish."

"Really! I hope not," said the vicar.

Ambrose, who had retired to his former position on the rug, began to listen intently. This sounded interesting.

"A month ago," she continued, "I put away some gold pieces for which I had no use, and they have been stolen."

"Did you lock them up?" asked Mr Hawthorne.

"I did a safer thing than that," said Miss Barnicroft, laughing contemptuously; "I buried them."

"In your garden?"

"No. I put them into a honey-jar and buried it in what, I believe, is called the Roman Camp, not far from my house."

The words, spoken in Miss Barnicroft's clear cold tones, fell icily on Ambrose's ear, and seemed to turn him to stone. He and David were thieves! It was no antique vessel they had discovered, but a common honey-pot; no Roman coins, but Miss Barnicroft's money. If only he had done as David wished, and told his father long ago!

He clasped his hands closely over his scarlet face and listened for the vicar's answer.

"I don't think you chose a very safe place to hide your money," he said. "Gypsies and pedlars and tramps are constantly passing over Rumborough Common. Someone probably saw you bury it there."

"I am more inclined to think that it was stolen by someone in the parish," said Miss Barnicroft. "They were French napoleons," she added.

"Then you see they would be of no use to anyone living here, for they could not change them. They were more likely to be dug up by some of the gypsy people who so often camp about there, and are now far enough from Easney."

It was truly dreadful to Ambrose to hear his father talk in that calm soothing tone, and to imagine how he would feel if he knew that his own son Ambrose had taken Miss Barnicroft's money, and that the hateful little crock of gold was at that very moment lying quite near him in David's garden. His heart beat so fast that the sound of it seemed to fill the room. Would Miss Barnicroft never go away? He longed and yet dreaded to hear her say good-bye; for after that only one course was before him—confession.

But she remained some time longer, for she was not at all satisfied to have the matter treated so quietly. She tried to impress upon Mr Hawthorne that it was his duty to make a thorough inquiry amongst his people, for she felt certain, she said with an air of conviction which made Ambrose tremble, that her money was somewhere in Easney.

"I should advise you in future, Miss Barnicroft," said the vicar when she at last took her departure, "to bring me anything you wish taken care of—it would be safer here than burying it. And there's the bank, you know, in Nearminster. I should be glad to take any money there for you at any time."

"You are very kind," she answered with an airy toss of the feathers and ribbons on her head, "but no banks for me. Banks fail."

She flitted out of the room, followed by Mr Hawthorne, and Ambrose was alone. Now, in a minute, he would have to tell his father. There was the hall-door shutting; there was his step coming back. How should he begin?

"Well, my boy," said the vicar, "how's the head? Not much better, I'm afraid. You look quite flushed. You'd better go to your mother now; she's just come in."

He sat down and lifted his pen to go on with a letter. Ambrose got up from the rug and stood irresolute by the door. He tried to say "Father," but no voice came, and Mr Hawthorne did not look round or ask what he wanted. It made it so much worse that he did not notice or suspect anything.

"I can't do it now," said Ambrose to himself, "I must tell David first."

Lessons were only just over in the school-room, and he found David putting away his books, while Pennie and Nancy, still with their hats and cloaks on, were talking very fast about all they had seen and done in Nearminster. How happy they looked! They had nothing dreadful on their minds. It made Ambrose all the more anxious to have someone to bear his secret with him, and he went softly up to David and said in a low voice:

"I want to speak to you."

"All right!" said David rather unwillingly, for he wanted to hear more about Nearminster and Kettles.

"Not here," whispered Ambrose. "Upstairs—in the museum. It's very important."

David turned and looked at his brother. Ambrose's cheeks were scarlet, his eyes had a scared expression, and his hair was sticking up in spikes as if he had been running his hands through it.

At these certain signs of excitement David at once concluded that something had happened. He hastily thrust away his last books, and the two boys left the school-room.

"Is it a ghost?" he asked as they ran up the flight of stairs leading to the museum.

"Much worse," returned Ambrose. "It's something real. It's awful."

The museum looked bare and cold, and rather dusty, as if it had been neglected lately; its deal shelves with their large white labels and wide empty spaces seemed to gape hungrily—a cheerless place altogether, with nothing comfortable or encouraging about it.

The boys sat down facing each other on two boxes, and Ambrose at once began his story. Alarming as the news was, he had a faint hope while he was telling it that David might not think it so bad as he did. David always took things calmly, and his matter-of-fact way of looking at them was often a support to Ambrose, whose imagination made him full of fears. So now when he had finished he looked wistfully at his brother and said, in a tone full of awe:

"Should you think we really are *thieves*?"

David's blue eyes got very large and round, but before answering this question he put another: "What can they do to thieves?"

"Put them in prison, and make them work hard for ever so long," replied Ambrose. "They used to hang them," he added gloomily.

"I don't believe father would let them put us in prison," said David.

"He couldn't help it," said Ambrose. "Nobody's father can. Don't you remember when Giles Brown stole a silver mug, his father walked ten miles to ask them to let him off, and they wouldn't?"

"Well, but,"—said David, feeling that there was a difference between the two cases—"he stole a thing out of a house, and we didn't; and his father was a hedger and ditcher, and our father is vicar of Easney."

"That wouldn't matter," said Ambrose. "It would depend on Miss Barnicroft. She wouldn't let us off. She said she couldn't bear boys. She'd be glad to have us punished."

He rested his chin on his hand and stared forlornly on the ground.

"It's telling father I mind most," he added presently, "much more than going to prison."

But here David disagreed. He thought it would be dreadful to go to prison.

"I suppose," he said, "we should be shut up in different cells, and only have bread and water. I think the sooner we tell father the better, because he'll think of some way to help us."

"I shall never be able to begin," said Ambrose despairingly.

"Well, you ought to," said David, "because you're older than me, and because you thought of the whole thing, and because I wanted to tell long ago, and because I did say when we found it that it was only an old honey-pot."

Far from being a comfort, every word David spoke seemed to add to the sharpness of Ambrose's misery, their very truth made them bitter.

"It's no good saying all that now," he cried impatiently. "Oh, I wish I was in bed and had told father!"

After a little consultation it was agreed that this must be done that very evening, directly after the school-room tea, when Mr Hawthorne was generally to be found alone in his study. If he should happen to be engaged, it must be put off till the next day.

"I hope he won't be," said David, as the boys went down-stairs together, "because it will be getting dark, and even if the lamp is lighted it will be much easier than telling it in the daylight."

But Ambrose, in his own heart, could not help a faint hope that their father might be too busy to speak to them that night. Anything to put off the confession. He dreaded it far more than David, partly because he was naturally more timid, and partly because he felt himself chiefly to blame in the whole affair, for David would certainly never have thought of the adventure unless his elder brother had suggested it. During tea-time, therefore, he found it impossible either to join in the conversation or to eat anything with this dreaded interview still before him.

Resting his hot cheek on his hand, he looked on with surprise at his brother's steady appetite, for David, perhaps feeling that this was the last comfortable meal he might enjoy for some time, munched away with his usual zeal, not forgetting to ask for the "burnt side" when his slice of cake was cut. It was hard to realise that all this might be changed on the morrow for a lonely cell, bread and water, and the deepest disgrace! Ambrose's headache was considered sufficient reason for his silence and want of appetite, and his sisters, finding that they could not even extract any news about Miss Barnicroft's visit from him, left him undisturbed to his moody misery.

Late that afternoon the vicar came in from a long ride to a distant part of his parish, threw himself into his easy-chair, and took up the newspaper for a little rest before dinner. At this hour he was generally secure from interruption, his day's work was over, the children were safe in the school-room, there was a comfortable half-hour before he need think of going upstairs. He was just rejoicing in the prospect of this repose when a little knock came at his door. It was a very little knock, one of many

which Ambrose and David had already made so timidly that they could not be heard at all. With a patient sigh Mr Hawthorne laid his paper across his knees and said, "Come in."

The door opened very slowly and the boys entered, David somewhat in front, holding Ambrose by the hand. Their father saw at once that they had something of importance on their minds, for while Ambrose kept his eyes fixed on the ground, David's were open to their widest extent with a sort of guilty stare. Neither spoke a word, but marched up to Mr Hawthorne and stood in perfect silence at his elbow.

"Well?" said the vicar inquiringly.

Ambrose gave a twitch to David's sleeve, for he had promised to speak first.

"We've come to say—" began David and then stopped, his eyes getting bigger and rounder, but not moving from his father's face.

"Go on," said Mr Hawthorne.

But David seemed unable to say anything more. He turned to his brother and whispered hoarsely, "You go on now."

Ambrose had gathered a little courage now that the confession had really begun, and he murmured without looking up:

"We know where Miss Barnicraft's money is."

The vicar started. He had in truth forgotten all about Miss Barnicraft and her money, for he had thought it merely one of her own crazy inventions. That Ambrose and David should have anything to do with it seemed impossible, and yet the guilty solemn looks of the two little boys showed that they were in the most serious earnest.

"Miss Barnicraft's money!" he repeated.

"It's in my garden," continued David, taking his turn to speak, "buried."

Completely bewildered Mr Hawthorne looked from one face to the other.

"I don't know what you're both talking about," he said. "Ambrose, you are the elder, try to explain what you mean, and

how you and David come to know anything about Miss Barnicroft's money."

That was not so easy, but at last, by dint of some help from David and many questions from his father, Ambrose halted lamely through the history. He had a feeling that the vicar's face was getting graver and graver as he went on, but he did not dare to look up, and it was David who asked anxiously when he had finished:

"Are we thieves, father? Will she put us in prison?"

"Did you remember, Ambrose," said Mr Hawthorne, "when you asked your brother to go with you to Rumborough Camp, that you and he are strictly forbidden to go so far alone?"

"Yes, father," whispered Ambrose, "but we did so want things for the museum."

"And when you had taken all this trouble to get them, why did you not put the coins into the museum?"

"Because," put in David, "we were afraid the others would ask where we got them. But we didn't know they belonged to Miss Barnicroft, so *are* we thieves, father?"

That seemed to David the one important point to be settled. If they were not thieves they would not be sent to prison.

"As far as Miss Barnicroft is concerned, you are not thieves," replied Mr Hawthorne.

David gave a sigh of relief.

"But—" he continued gravely, "you and Ambrose have stolen something from me of much more value than Miss Barnicroft's money. Do you know what that is?"

The boys were silent.

"Listen, and I will try to explain what I mean," said the vicar; "and I speak more particularly to you, Ambrose, because you are older than David, and he did wrong through your persuasion. When you dug the coins up you did not know that you were taking what belonged to someone else, but you did know very well that you were disobedient in going there at all. That is what was wrong, and by doing that you have destroyed my trust in you. Now, trust in anyone is a most precious thing,

more precious a great deal than Miss Barnicroft's money, and much harder to give back when it is once lost. The money you will return to-morrow; but how are you going to restore my trust? That is not to be done in a moment. Sometimes, after we once lose a person's trust, we can never give it back at all, and that is very sad, because nothing else in the world makes up for it."

"Sha'n't you ever trust us any more?" asked David bluntly, with his eyes full of tears.

"I hope so," said his father, "but that must depend on yourselves. You will have to show me that you are worthy of trust."

Crest-fallen and sorrowful, the boys crept out of the study when the interview was over.

"I do believe," said Ambrose, "I would rather have been sent to prison, or have had some very bad punishment."

"It'll be rather bad, though, to-morrow to have to take it back to Miss Barnicroft, won't it?" said David. "Do you suppose father will go in with us?"

That very evening, in the twilight, the crock with its glittering pieces was unearthed for the second time, but with far less labour than at first.

"I'm glad it's out of my garden anyway," said David as they went back to the house with it.

"I'm not glad of anything," replied Ambrose despairingly; and indeed he felt that he should never care about pleasure or be happy again until his father had said that he could trust him.

Snuff, the terrier, knew quite well the next morning when the boys started with their father that there was something wrong. No smiles, no shouts, no laughter, no throwing of sticks for him to fetch—only two sad and sober little boys marching along by the vicar's side. The dog tried at first, by dancing round them with short barks and jumps, to excite the dull party into gaiety, but soon finding no response forsook them altogether, and abandoned himself heart and soul to a frantic rabbit hunt. Rumborough Common looked coldly desolate as ever, and as they passed the Camp and saw the very hole where the crock had been buried an idea struck David.

"Mightn't we put it where we got it, and tell her it's there?" he asked.

But the vicar would not hear of this.

"You must give it back into Miss Barnicroft's own hands," he answered, "and tell her how you came to dig it up. Perhaps Ambrose had better go in alone, and we will wait here in the lane for him."

Arrived at Miss Barnicroft's gate, Ambrose hung back and cast an imploring glance at his father. He had wished for a "bad punishment;" but it was too dreadful to face all the unknown terrors of Miss Barnicroft's house alone.

"Come, Ambrose," said Mr Hawthorne encouragingly, "you must take courage. It is never easy to confess our faults, but there is nothing really to fear. It will soon be over."

Ambrose pushed open the gate, and with the crock under his arm crept a few steps towards the cottage door. Then he turned, his face white with fear.

"You won't go away till I come out," he said. David had been standing by his father's side, feeling very much relieved that he was not to go in and see Miss Barnicroft. He had still a lingering doubt in his mind that she might wish to send him and his brother to prison. But when Ambrose gave that frightened look back, something made him feel that he must go in too; he left his father without a word, went up to Ambrose, and took hold of his hand.

"I'll go in with you," he said.

How often they had longed to see the inside of this mysterious dwelling, and yet now that the moment had come, how gladly would they have found themselves safely at home in the Vicarage! Pennie and Ambrose had vied with each other in providing strange and weird articles of furniture and ornaments for it; but the reality was almost startlingly different. When, after several knocks, the boys were told to "come in," they entered a room which was just like that in any other cottage, except that it was barer. There was, indeed, scarcely any furniture at all, no curtain to the window, no pictures on the blank whitewashed walls, and only a very tiny square of carpet on the floor. A common deal table stood in the middle of this, and two deal boxes or packing-cases seemed to serve for seats; on the wide hearth, a fire of sticks was crackling under a kettle

which hung over it by a chain, and two dogs which had been asleep, got up and growled at the strangers. There was nothing the least strange in the room, unless it was Miss Barnicroft herself, who, with her head tied up in a white cotton handkerchief, sat on one of the boxes, writing busily in a book. She gazed at her two visitors without knowing them at first, but soon a light came into her eyes.

"Ah, the vicar's little boys, I think?" she said graciously. "Pray sit down."

She waved her hand with the majesty of a queen towards the other box, and the boys, not daring to dispute her least sign, bestowed themselves upon it, as close together as possible, with the fatal little crock squeezed between them. There they sat for a minute in silence staring at Miss Barnicroft, who, with her head bent gently forward and a look of polite inquiry, waited to hear their errand.

It was so dreadful to see her sitting there, and to know how her face would change presently, that Ambrose had a wild impulse to run out of the room and leave the crock to tell its own tale. He gave a glance at David, and saw by the way he had placed his hands on his knees, and fixed his eyes immovably on Miss Barnicroft, that he had no intention of either moving or speaking. Ambrose was the elder; it was for him to take the lead. There were times when Ambrose would cheerfully have given up all the rights and privileges belonging to that position, and this was one of them, but he knew that he must make an effort. Father was waiting outside. They could not sit there in silence any longer. He must speak.

Seizing the crock, he suddenly rushed up to Miss Barnicroft, held it out, and said huskily:

"We've come to bring back this!"

David now slid off the box and placed himself gravely at his brother's side. Miss Barnicroft looked from the boys to the crock with a satirical light in her eyes.

"And may I ask where you found it?" she said with icy distinctness which seemed to cut the air like a knife.

"In Rumborough Camp," murmured Ambrose.

"I knew the thief was in your father's parish," said Miss Barnicroft, "and I'm not surprised to find that it's a boy; but I certainly didn't suspect the vicar's own son."

"We didn't know the money was yours," broke in David, "and father says we are not thieves."

"At any rate," returned Miss Barnicroft, fixing him sharply with her cold light eyes, "you knew it wasn't yours. *I* was always taught that to take what was not mine was stealing."

"We thought it was Roman," said David, still undaunted, "and they're all dead." Then, seeing no reason for staying longer, he added quickly, "Good-bye! father's waiting for us."

"Oh, really!" said Miss Barnicroft, rising with a short laugh. "Well, you can give him my compliments, and say that I haven't altered my opinion of boys, and that I advise him to teach you your catechism, particularly your duty towards your neighbour."

As the boys made hurriedly for the doorway, she suddenly called to them in quite a different voice,—*"Stay a minute. Won't you have some ambrosia before you go?"*

Ambrose had no idea what ambrosia could be, but he at once concluded that it was something poisonous.

"No, thank you," he said, pulling David's sleeve to make him refuse too.

"It's honey and goat's milk," said Miss Barnicroft persuasively; "very delicious. You'd better taste it."

"We'd much rather not, thank you," said Ambrose with a slight shudder, and in another second he and David had unlatched the door, scudded down the garden like two frightened rabbits, and joined their father.

At the Vicarage, all this while, their return had been eagerly looked for by Pennie and Nancy. They had heard the whole adventure of Rumborough Common and the crock of gold with much interest, and although the boys had been wrong to disobey orders, and were now in disgrace, it was impossible not to regard them with sympathy. They had been through so much that was unusual and daring that they were in some sort heroes of romance, and now this was increased by their having penetrated into that abode of mystery, Miss Barnicroft's cottage.

It was somewhat consoling to the boys, after their real alarm and discomfort, to be received in this way at home, and questioned with so much eagerness as to their experiences. Ambrose, indeed, warming to the subject, was inclined to give a very highly-coloured description of what had passed, and would soon have filled Miss Barnicroft's dwelling with wonderful objects, if he had not been kept in check by David, who always saw things exactly as they were, and had a very good memory.

"When we went in," began Ambrose, "some immense dogs got up and barked furiously."

"Weren't you frightened?" asked Pennie.

"I wasn't," replied David, "because there were only two—quite small ones, not bigger than Snuff, and they only growled."

"Miss Barnicroft had got her head all bound up in linen," pursued Ambrose, "like the picture of Lazarus in the big Bible."

"It was a pocket-handkerchief," said David. "I saw the mark in one corner."

"What was in the room?" asked Nancy.

"Nothing," said David, "except Miss Barnicroft, and two boxes and a table, and the dogs."

"Oh, *David!*" broke in Ambrose in a tone of remonstrance; "there was a great cauldron smoking over the fire, a regular witch's cauldron!"

"I don't know what a cauldron is," said David; "but there was a black kettle, if you mean that."

"And only think, Pennie," continued Ambrose; "she offered us something, she called *ambrosia*. I daresay it was made of toadstools and poisonous herbs picked at night."

"She said it was honey and goat's milk," finished David; "but we didn't taste it."

As long as there remained anything to tell about Miss Barnicroft, Ambrose was quite excited and cheerful; but soon after the adventure had been fully described, he became very quiet, and presently gave a heavy sigh; on being asked by Pennie what was the matter, he confided to her that he never could be

happy again, because father had said he was not fit to be trusted.

"It doesn't matter so much about David," he added mournfully; "but you see I'm so much older. Do you think there's anything I could do? anything very dangerous and difficult?"

"Like Casabianca," said Pennie, thinking of a poem she was fond of reciting:

"The boy stood on the burning deck,
Whence all but he had fled."

"Oh, don't go on," cried Nancy, "about that stupid boy. He couldn't have supposed his father wanted him to stop there and be all burnt up. I'm sure he wasn't fit to be trusted."

"We're not to have any pocket-money for a month," continued Ambrose, taking no notice of Nancy; "but I don't mind that a bit. It's the other I mind."

Pennie was sorry for her brother; but this last remark turned her thoughts another way. No pocket-money! She glanced ruefully at her china-house. Fate was certainly against Miss Unity's mandarin. Nancy saw the glance and smiled triumphantly.

"There, you see!" she exclaimed. "There's nobody left to give anything to it, so you'd much better give it up, and begin to collect for Kettles."

In season and out of season she never ceased to impress this on Pennie, and although they did not see Kettles again after meeting her at the College, she soon became quite a familiar acquaintance. The little girls carried on a sort of running chronicle, in which Kettles was the chief character, and was made to do and say various surprising things. Those were mostly suggested by Pennie, for Nancy, though equally interested, would much have preferred a glimpse of the real Kettles herself. She never could secure this, though, whenever she drove into Nearminster, she hung over the waggonette to peer into Anchor and Hope Alley with such earnestness that she nearly toppled over. Once she was somewhat repaid by seeing a ragged man in a long coat and battered hat turn into the alley.

"Pennie," she said, directly she got back, "I do believe I've seen Kettles' father."

All these talks and fancies made Pennie feel weaker and weaker in holding to her own plan.

She was tired of standing quite alone, and though her pride was still a little hurt at her failure, she could not help seeing how much more interesting it was to have Nancy's sympathy and help.

So, one day, she took her money out of the china-house, rubbed the label off the door, and restored the box to David. Nancy knew, when she saw that, that Pennie's support in the matter of shoes and stockings for Kettles was secure.

Chapter Six.

"Dancing."

The even course of Miss Unity's life in her dark old house at Nearminster had been somewhat ruffled lately. A troublesome question, which she could neither dismiss nor answer, presented itself so continually before her that her peace of mind was quite destroyed. It was always there. It sat with her at her wool-work, so that she used the wrong shades of green; it made her absent while she dusted the china, so that she nearly dropped her most valuable pieces; and more than once it got mixed up with her marketing, and made her buy what she did not want, to Betty's great surprise.

Every morning when she woke it was ready for her, and this was the form of it:

"Am I doing my duty to my god-daughter, Penelope Hawthorne?"

Miss Unity's conscience pricked her. There were, in truth, several things she considered important which she did not approve of in Pennie; and yet, being a timid lady as well as a conscientious one, she had always shrunk from interference.

"Mary ought to know best," she argued with herself in reply to the obstinate question; "she is the child's mother. I shall offend her if I say anything. But then, again, as godmother, I have some responsibility too; and if I see plainly that Penelope pokes over her books and writing too much, and is getting high-shouldered, and comes into the room awkwardly, and does not

hold herself upright, I ought to speak. I owe it to the child. I ought not to consult my own comfort. How I should have to reproach myself if she were to grow up untidy, rough-haired, inky, the sort of woman who thinks of nothing but scribbling. And I see signs of it. She might even come to write books! What she wants is a refining influence—the companionship of some nice, lady-like girls, like the Merridews, instead of romping about so much with her brothers and Nancy, who is quite as bad as a boy. But how to make Mary see it!”

Miss Unity sighed heavily when she came to this point. She felt that Pennie’s future was in some measure in her hands, and it was a very serious burden. One afternoon, feeling it impossible either to forget the subject or to find any answer to it, she put away her work and went to call upon the dean’s wife, Mrs Merridew. If anything could change the current of her thoughts it would be a visit to the deanery, which she considered both a pleasure and a privilege. Everything there pleased her sense of fitness and decorum, from the gravity of the servants to the majestic, ponderous furniture of the rooms, and she thought all the arrangements admirable. It is true that she did not understand Dr Merridew’s portly jokes, and was rather afraid of his wife, but her approval of their five daughters was unbounded. They were models of correct behaviour—her very ideal of what young people should be in every respect. If only, she secretly sighed, Mary’s girls were more like them!

The Merridews, Miss Unity was accustomed to say, were quite the “nicest” people in Nearminster, and she sincerely thought that she enjoyed their society immensely. It was, however, quite a different enjoyment to that which attended a cup of tea with old Miss Spokes, the greatest gossip in the town, and was slightly mingled with awe.

On this occasion Miss Unity was singularly favoured by fortune, although she had not gone to the deanery with any idea of finding help in her perplexity, for before she had been there five minutes the conversation took a most lucky turn. Mrs Merridew had been so much concerned lately, she said, about her dear Ethel’s right shoulder. It was certainly growing out; and, indeed the four younger girls would all be much better for some dancing and drilling lessons. There was nothing she so much disliked as an awkward carriage. She was sure Miss Unity would agree with her that it was important for girls to hold themselves properly. Miss Unity, with Pennie in her mind, assented earnestly, and added that she believed Miss Cannon had a class for dancing at her school in the town.

"Oh yes, I know!" replied Mrs Merridew; "and I hear she has a very good master, Monsieur Deville; but I don't quite fancy the children going there—all the townspeople, you know. I don't think the dean would quite like it."

"Oh no! to be sure not," murmured Miss Unity.

"No, it's not quite what one would wish," continued Mrs Merridew; "but I've been wondering if I could get up a nice little class here!—just a dozen or so of children among my own friends, and have Monsieur Deville to teach them. You see he comes down to Miss Cannon every week, so there would be no difficulty about his coming on here."

Miss Unity could hardly believe her ears, for, of course, the next step on Mrs Merridew's part was to wonder if Mrs Hawthorne would let her children join the class. Could anything be more fortunate, not only because of Pennie's deportment, but because it would give her a chance of improving her acquaintance with the dean's daughters. It was the very thing of all others to be wished.

Quite stirred and excited out of her usual retirement, Miss Unity offered to lay the matter before Mrs Hawthorne in the course of a few days, when she was going to stay at Easney. She felt sure, she said, that it could be arranged; and she finally took her leave, feeling that she had at last accomplished some part of her duty towards her god-daughter, and much happier in her mind. This lasted until she reached her own door-step, and then she began to shrink from what she had undertaken to do. She had the deepest distrust of her own powers of persuasion, and as she thought of it, it seemed very unlikely to her that she should succeed in placing the subject in its proper light before Mrs Hawthorne. Never in her whole life had she ventured or wished to advise other people, or to see what was best for them. It was a bold step. "I shall say the wrong thing and offend Mary, or set her against it in some way," she said to herself. "It would have been better to leave it in Mrs Merridew's hands."

She troubled herself with this during the days that remained before her visit to Easney, and grew more anxious and desponding as time went on. If the welfare of Pennie's whole life had depended on her joining the dancing-class, poor Miss Unity could scarcely have made it of more importance.

It was, therefore, in a very wrought-up state that she arrived at the vicarage, determined to speak to Mrs Hawthorne that very

same day, for until it was over she felt she should not have a moment's comfort. She had brooded over it so constantly, and held so many imaginary conversations about it, that she had become highly nervous, and was odder in manner and more abrupt in speech than ever. As she sat at tea with Mrs Hawthorne, she answered all her inquiries about Nearminster strangely at random, for she was saying to herself over and over again, "It is my duty; I must do it."

Suddenly the door was flung wide open, and Pennie threw herself hastily into the room.

"Oh mother!" she cried, "will you lend me your india-rubber?"

Miss Unity set down her tea-cup with a nervous clatter as her god-daughter advanced to greet her. Yes, Pennie certainly poked out her chin and shrugged up one shoulder. She had none of the easy grace which adorned the Merridews. All her movements were abrupt. Worst of all, on the middle finger of the hand she held out was a large black stain of ink.

"My *dear* Pennie," said her mother significantly as she noticed this.

"Yes, I know, mother," said Pennie immediately doubling down the offending finger, "I can't get it off. I've tried everything. You see I've been writing up the magazine, and there's such a lot of it, because the others always forget."

"Then I think I should do without their contributions," said Mrs Hawthorne.

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Pennie reproachfully, "there'd be hardly anything in it. It's a very good one this month," she added, turning to Miss Unity. "David's sent quite a long thing on 'The Habits of the Pig,' and Ambrose has written an 'Ode to Spring.'"

"Then why," inquired Miss Unity, "have you so much writing to do?"

"Well, you see I'm the editor," explained Pennie, "and all the things have to be copied into the magazine in printing hand by the first of the month. So when the others forget, I do it all."

"How fast Pennie grows!" began Miss Unity hurriedly as the door closed behind her god-daughter. "You don't think so much writing makes her stoop too much?"

"Oh, no!" replied Mrs Hawthorne lightly; "it's a great amusement to her, and she gets plenty of exercise."

"Because," continued Miss Unity, speaking so fast that she was almost unintelligible, "if you thought so—I thought—that is, Mrs Merridew thought—you might like her to join a dancing-class at the deanery."

She paused, frightened at her own boldness. She had meant to approach the subject in the most delicate and gradual manner, and now she had rushed into the very thick of it at once.

Mrs Hawthorne looked puzzled; she frowned a little.

"I do not understand," she said, "what Mrs Merridew can have to do with Pennie's writing too much."

"Oh nothing, nothing in the world!" hastily replied Miss Unity; "of course not. I have always said it's for you to judge—but I said I would ask you to let the children join. Mr Deville's going to teach them. The Merridews are nice girls, don't you think?" she added wistfully, for she saw no answering approval on Mrs Hawthorne's face. "I knew I should offend Mary," she said to herself.

Even when the arrangement with all its advantages was fully explained, Mrs Hawthorne did not seem at all eager about it. She had once thought, she said, of sending the children to Miss Cannon's class, but the distance was the difficulty, and that would remain in this case.

Then Miss Unity made her last effort.

"As to that," she said breathlessly, "I thought of asking you to allow me to give Pennie some lessons, and I should be pleased for her to sleep at my house after the class every week, if you had no objection."

But Mrs Hawthorne still hesitated. It was most kind of Miss Unity, but she feared it would trouble her to have Pennie so often; yet she did not like to refuse such a very kind offer, and no doubt the lessons would be good for the child. Finally, after a great many pros and cons, it was settled that the vicar's opinion should be asked, and then Miss Unity knew that Mary had decided the matter in her own mind. Her offer was to be accepted. So she had done her best for her god-daughter, and if it were not successful her conscience would at least be at rest.

Perhaps no one realised what an effort it had been to her, and what real self-sacrifice such an offer involved. She was fond of Pennie, but to have the regularity of her household disturbed by the presence of a child every week—the bustle of arrival and departure, the risk of broken china, the possible upsetting of Betty's temper; all this was torture to look forward to, and when she went to bed she felt that she was paying dearly for a quiet conscience.

But if it was a trial to Miss Unity it was none the less so to Pennie, who looked upon herself as a sort of victim chosen out of the family to be sacrificed. She was to go alone to the deanery without Nancy, and learn to dance with the Merridews, who were almost strangers to her. It was a most dreadful idea. Quite enough to spoil Nearminster, or the most pleasant place on earth. However, mother said so, and it must be done; but from the moment she heard of it Pennie did not cease to groan and lament.

"I don't even know their names," she began one night, after she and Nancy were tucked up side by side in bed.

"Why, you know there's one called Ethel," replied Nancy, "because whenever Mrs Merridew comes here she asks how old you are, and says, 'Just the age of my Ethel!'"

"I don't think I like the look of any of them much," continued Pennie mournfully, "and—oh, Nancy, I do hope I sha'n't see the dean!"

"Why?" asked Nancy. "I don't mind him a bit."

"He never makes jokes at you," said Pennie, "so of course you don't mind him; but whenever I meet him with father I know just what he'll say. 'This is Miss Penelope, isn't it? and where's Ulysses?' and then he laughs. I can't laugh, because I don't know what he means, and I do feel so silly. Suppose he comes and says it before all the others!"

"I don't see that it matters if he does," replied Nancy. "You needn't take any notice. It's the dean who's silly, not you."

"It's all very well for you," said Pennie with an impatient kick at the bed-clothes; "you're not going. Oh! how I wish you were! It wouldn't be half so bad."

"I should hate it," said Nancy decidedly; "but," she added, with an attempt at comfort, "there'll be some things you like after

all. There'll be the Cathedral and the College, and old Nurse, and oh! Pennie, have you thought what a chance it'll be to hear more about Kettles?"

But Pennie was too cast-down to take a cheerful view of anything.

"I don't suppose I shall hear anything about her," she said. "How should I?"

"Perhaps you'll see her at the College again," said Nancy, "or perhaps Miss Unity will know about her, or perhaps the dean goes to see her father and mother."

"That I'm sure he doesn't," said Pennie with conviction. "Why, I don't suppose he even knows where Anchoranopally is."

"Father goes to see all the people in Easney," said Nancy, "so why shouldn't Dr Merridew go to see Kettles?"

"I don't know why he shouldn't," said Pennie, "but I'm quite sure he doesn't. At any rate I'm not going to ask him anything. I hope I sha'n't see him at all. Oh, why should people learn dancing? What good can it be?"

Nancy's muttered reply showed that she was very nearly asleep, so for that night there was no further conversation about Pennie's dancing, but it was by no means altogether given up. On the contrary it was a very favourite topic with all the children, for it seemed to have added to their eldest sister's dignity to be singled out as the only one to join the class at Nearminster.

"Why isn't Nancy to go too?" asked Ambrose one afternoon as he carefully put the last touches to a picture he was drawing for Dickie; it was a fancy portrait of Pennie learning to dance, with her dress held out very wide, and an immense toe pointed in the air. The children were all in the school-room engaged in various ways, for it was a wet afternoon; even Dickie, having grown tired of the nursery, had insisted on coming down until tea-time,—and now stood on tiptoe by Ambrose, watching the progress of the picture with breathless interest.

Pennie looked up from her writing at her brother's question.

"Because Miss Unity only asked me," she answered with a sort of groan.

"Is she fondest of you?" asked David from the background. He had not spoken for a long time, for he was deeply engaged in what he called "putting his cupboard to rights."

The four oldest children each possessed a cupboard below the book-shelves, where they were supposed to keep their toys and private property. David was very particular about his cupboard, and could not bear to find any stray articles belonging to the others put away in it. He kept it very neat, and all the curious odds and ends in it were carefully arranged, each in its proper place. Just now he had turned them all out on the floor, and was kneeling in front of them with his hands in his pockets.

"It's nothing to do with that," said Nancy in answer to his question. "It's because she's her godmother.—Why, David," she exclaimed suddenly looking over his shoulder, "there's my emery cushion which I lost ever so long ago!"

She pointed to a small cushion in the shape of a strawberry which lay among David's treasures. He picked it up and put it into his pocket before she could get hold of it.

"It was in my cupboard," he said slowly. "It had no business there. I shall 'fisticate it.'"

"'Fisticate!'" repeated Nancy with a laugh of contempt; "there's no such word; is there, Pennie?"

"There is," said David quite unmoved. "I had it in English history to-day. 'All his lands were 'fisticated.' I asked Miss Grey what it meant, and she said it meant 'taken away,' so I know it's right."

"You mean 'confiscate,'" put in Pennie; "but I do wish, David, you wouldn't try to use such long words when you write for the magazine. There's a lot in the 'Habits of the Pig' I can't make out, and it's such a trouble to copy them."

"I'm not going to lose my cushion at any rate," said Nancy, springing suddenly on David, so that he rolled over on the floor. Dickie immediately cast herself on the top of them with shrieks of delight, while Pennie and Ambrose went quietly on with their occupation in the midst of the uproar as though nothing were happening.

"I wonder if the Merridews are nice?" remarked Ambrose; "fancy five girls!"

"Only four are going to learn," said Pennie; "Miss Unity told me their names. There's Joyce, and Ethel, and Katharine, and Sabine."

"What rum names!" said Ambrose; "all except Katharine; almost as queer as Ethelwyn."

"They're not a bit like Ethelwyn to look at, though," said Pennie; "they're very neat and quiet, and I think not pretty."

"I suppose Ethelwyn was pretty, but she wasn't nice," said Ambrose thoughtfully; "and what a sneak she was about the mandarin!"

Pennie sighed; Ethelwyn and the mandarin were both painful subjects to her, and she felt just now as though the world were full of trials. There was this dreadful dancing-class looming in the distance—something awful and unknown, to which she was daily getting nearer and nearer. Ambrose understood much better than Nancy what she felt about it, and was a much more sympathetic listener, for he knew very well what it was to be afraid, and to dread what was strange and new. Nancy was quite sure that she should hate to learn dancing; but as to being afraid of the dean or any other dignitary, or minding the presence of any number of Merridews, that was impossible to imagine. So as the days went on Pennie confided her troubles chiefly to Ambrose; but she was soon seized with another anxiety in which he could be of no help.

"Those shoes are awfully shabby, mother," she said one morning; "don't you think I might have new ones?"

Mrs Hawthorne examined the shoes which Pennie had brought to her.

"Are those your best?" she asked, "it seems quite a short time since you and Nancy had new ones."

"Nancy's are quite nice still," said Pennie sorrowfully; "but just look how brown these toes are, and how they bulge out at the side."

"They were just the same as Nancy's when they were bought," said Mrs Hawthorne; "but if you will stand on one side of your foot, Pennie, of course you wear them out more quickly."

"I never mean to," said poor Pennie, gazing mournfully at the shabby shoe, "but it seems natural somehow."

"Well, you must try harder to remember in future," said her mother. "I should like to give you new shoes very much, but you know I have often told you I can't spend much on your clothes, and I'm afraid we must make the old ones do a little longer."

So this was another drop of bitterness added to Pennie's little cup of troubles. It was not only that the shoes were shabby, but they fastened with a button and a strap. She felt quite sure that the Merridews and all the other children at the class would wear shoes with sandals, and this was a most tormenting thought. She saw a vision of rows of elegantly shod feet, and one shabby misshapen pair amongst them.

"I think I want new shoes quite as much as Kettles does," she said one day to Nancy.

"You might have mine if you like," said Nancy, who was always ready to lend or give her things, "but I suppose they'd be too small."

"I can just squeeze into them," said Pennie, "and while I stand-still I can bear it—but I couldn't walk without screaming."

The dreaded day came, as all days must whether we want them or not, and Pennie found herself walking across the Close to the deanery with Betty, who carried a little parcel with the old shoes and a pair of black mittens in it. The grey Cathedral looked gravely down upon them as they passed, and Pennie looked up to where her own special monster perched grinning on his water-spout. The children had each chosen one of these grotesque figures to be their very own, and had given them names; Pennie called hers the Griffin. He had wings and claws, a long neck, and a half-human face, and seemed to be just poised for flight—as though at any moment he might spring away from his resting-place, and alight on the smooth green turf just outside the dean's door. Pennie often wondered what Dr Merridew would say if he found him there, but just now she had no room for such fancies; she only felt sure of the Griffin's sympathy, and said to herself as she nodded to him:

"When I see you again I shall be glad, because it will be over, and I shall be going home to tea." Another moment and they had arrived at the deanery.

"Miss Unity wishes to know, please, what time Miss Hawthorne is to be fetched," asked Betty.

It seemed odd to Pennie that she could not run across the Close to Miss Unity's house alone, but this by no means suited her godmother's ideas of propriety.

Having taken off her hat, changed her shoes, and put on the black mittens, Pennie was conducted to the dining-room, which was already prepared for the dancing-class, with the large table pushed into the window and the chairs placed solemnly round close to the wall. Some girls, who were chatting and laughing near the fire, all stopped short as she entered, and for one awful moment stared at the new-comer in silence.

Pennie felt that no one knew who she was; she stood pulling nervously at her mittens, a forlorn little being in a strange land. At last one of the girls came forward and shook hands with her.

"Won't you sit down?" she said; and Pennie having edged herself on to one of the high leather-covered chairs against the wall, she left her and returned to the group by the fire.

Pennie examined them.

"That must be Ethel," she thought, "and the tallest is Joyce, and the two with frocks alike must be Katharine and Sabine. It isn't nice of them not to take any notice of a visitor. We shouldn't do it at home."

Presently other children arrived, and then Miss Lacy, the governess, joined them. She went up to Pennie and asked her name.

"Why, of course," she said, "I ought to have remembered you. Ethel, come here and talk to Penelope. You two are just the same age, I think," she added as Ethel turned reluctantly from the group near the fire.

Pennie was very tired of hearing that she and Ethel were just the same age, and it did not seem to her any reason at all that they should want to know each other. Ethel, too, looked unwilling to be forced into a friendship, as she came listlessly forward and sat down by Pennie's side.

"Are you fond of dancing?" she inquired in a cold voice.

"I don't know," said Pennie, "I never tried. I don't think I shall be," she added.

Ethel was silent, employing the interval in a searching examination of her companion, from the tucker in her frock, to the strapped shoes on her feet. She had a way of half-closing her eyes while she did this, that Pennie felt to be extremely offensive. "I don't like her at all," she said to herself, "and if she doesn't want to talk to me, I'm sure I don't want to talk to her."

"We've always been taught by Miss Lacy," said Ethel at last, "but of course it's much better to have a master."

"I should like Miss Lacy best," said Pennie; and while Ethel was receiving this answer with another long stare, Monsieur Deville was announced.

The dancing-master was tall and slim, with a springing step and a very graceful bow; his sleek hair was brushed across a rather bald head, and he had a long reddish nose. He carried a small fiddle, on which he was able to play while he was executing the most agile and difficult steps for the benefit of his pupils. On that day, and always, it was marvellous to Pennie to see how he could go sliding and capering about the room, never making one false note, nor losing his balance, and generally talking and explaining as he went. He spoke English as though it had been his native tongue, and indeed there did not seem to be anything French about him except his name.

The class opened with various exercises, which Pennie was able to do pretty well by dint of paying earnest attention to the child immediately in front of her, but soon some steps followed which she knew nothing about. She stood in perplexity, trying to gather some idea from the hopping springing figures around her. They had all learnt dancing before, and found no difficulty in what looked to her a hopeless puzzle. "Bend the knees, young ladies!" shouted Monsieur Deville above the squeaking of his fiddle. "Slide gently. Keep the head erect. *Very good*, Miss Smithers. The wrong foot, Miss Hawthorne. Draw in the chin; dear, dear, that won't do at all,"—stopping suddenly.

Miss Lacy now advanced to inform Monsieur that Miss Hawthorne was quite a beginner, at which every member of the class turned her head and looked at Pennie. What a hateful thing a dancing lesson was!

"Ah! we shall soon improve, no doubt," said Monsieur cheerfully; "the great thing is to practise the exercises thoroughly—to make the form supple and elastic. Without that as a foundation we can do nothing. With it we can do wonders.

Miss Hawthorne had better try that step alone. The rest stand-still."

Pennie would have given the world to run out of the room, but she grasped her dress courageously, and fixing a desperate eye on Monsieur's movements, copied them as well as she could.

"That will do for the present. All return to your seats. The Miss Smiths will now dance '*Les Deux Armes*.'"

Two sisters, old pupils of Monsieur Deville, advanced with complacency into the middle of the room.

"A little fancy dance composed by myself," said the dancing-master, turning to Miss Lacy as he played a preliminary air, "supposed to represent the quarrel and reconciliation of two friends, introducing steps from the minuet and gavotte. It has been considered a graceful trifle."

Pennie gazed in awe-struck wonder at the Miss Smiths as they moved with conscious grace and certainty through the various figures of the dance, now curtsying haughtily to each other, now with sudden abruptness turning their backs and pirouetting down the room on the very tips of their toes; now advancing, now retreating, now on the very point of reconciliation, and now bounding apart as though nothing were further from their thoughts. Finally, after the spectators for some time in doubt as to their intentions, they came down the length of the room with what Monsieur called a *chassé* step, and curtsied gracefully hand in hand.

"Well, at any rate," thought Pennie with a sigh of relief, "I shall never be able to dance well enough to do that; that's one comfort."

The class lasted two long hours and finished by a march round the room, the tallest pupil at the head and the shortest bringing up the rear.

"Why," asked Monsieur, "do we begin with the left foot?"

And the old pupil immediately answered:

"Because it is the military rule."

This impressed Pennie a good deal; but afterwards when she found that Monsieur never failed to ask this before the march began, the effect wore off, and she even felt equal to answering

him herself. But that was after many lessons had passed; at present everything seemed strange and difficult, and she was so nervous that she hardly knew her right foot from her left.

After the marching was over it was time for Monsieur to put his fiddle into its case, and to say with a graceful sweeping bow, "Good evening, young ladies!" A joyful sound to Pennie. In a minute she had torn off her mittens, changed her shoes, and was on her way back to Miss Unity's house.

"It was much worse than I thought it would be," she said as she sat at tea with her godmother; "but I sha'n't see any of them again for another week, that's one good thing."

Chapter Seven.

Pennie at Nearminster.

Miss Unity was surprised to find, as time went on, that Pennie's weekly visits were neither irksome nor disturbing; there was something about them, on the contrary, that she really liked. She could not account for it, but it was certainly true that instead of dreading Thursday she was glad when it came, and quite sorry when it was over. And then it was such a comfort to find that Betty, far from making any objection or difficulty, was pleased to approve of the arrangement, and even when Pennie, who was very untidy, rumpled the anti-macassars and upset the precise position of the drawing-room chairs, she neither murmured nor frowned.

Miss Unity was happier just now than she had been for a long while, for although her life flowed on from year to year in placid content it had not much active interest in it. If it had few anxieties it also had few pleasures, and each day as it came was exactly like the one which had gone before. But now there was one day, Pennie's day, as Miss Unity called it in her thoughts, which was quite different from any other in the week. The moment she arrived, full of her eager little schemes and fancies, with all sorts of important news from Easney, Dickie's last funny saying, how far baby could crawl, and what the boys had been doing, the quiet old house seemed to brighten up and grow young again. Echoes of all the little voices which had sounded there long ago woke from their sleep, and filled the staircase and the sombre rooms with chatter and laughter.

It made Miss Unity herself feel younger to hear the news, and she soon found it easy to be really interested in all that Pennie had to tell her. She proved such an attentive listener, and Pennie, after the restraint of the dancing-class, was so inclined to be confidential and talkative, that tea became a most agreeable and sociable meal. Betty, on her part, honoured the occasion by sending up hot-buttered cakes of peculiar excellence, which ever afterwards were closely connected with dancing in Pennie's mind.

As for the class itself, the misery of it was certainly softened as time went on, but it always remained somewhat of a trial to Pennie, and she never distinguished herself as a pupil. It was disappointing to find, too, that the acquaintance with the Merridews from which Miss Unity had hoped so much, did not advance quickly; she inquired anxiously, after a few lessons, how Pennie got on with her companions.

"Pretty well," answered Pennie; "I like the look of Sabine best, I think."

"But she's quite a little thing," said Miss Unity. "Ethel is your age, is she not?"

Pennie assented with some reserve.

"If you like," said Miss Unity with a great effort, "we might ask Ethel to come to tea with you and spend the evening on Thursday."

Pennie raised a face of unfeigned alarm from her plate.

"Oh, please not!" she exclaimed pleadingly, "what should we talk about all the evening? I'm sure we don't like the same things at all—and I'm sure she wouldn't care about coming either."

So, greatly to Miss Unity's own relief, it was decided once for all that Ethel should not be asked to tea, and she continued to find increasing satisfaction in her god-daughter's society.

There was another matter which Pennie had not advanced since her visits to Nearminster, and that was her acquaintance with Kettles. She neither saw nor heard anything of her, which was not surprising, since neither Miss Unity nor the Merridews were likely to know of her existence. To Nancy, however, it seemed absurd that Pennie should go every week to Nearminster and

bring back no news at all. She began to feel sure that Pennie had not made good use of her opportunities.

"Do you mean to say you know nothing more about her at all?" she asked with contempt. "Well, if I were you, I should have found out something by this time, I know."

Pennie bore these reproofs meekly, for she felt their justice. Nancy always did manage to find out things better than she did, but at the same time she could not think of any way of getting information. At last accident came to her aid.

One evening as they sat together after tea, Miss Unity winding wool and Pennie holding the skein, the former rose to get something out of the cupboard near the fireplace. As she reached to the back of it something round and smooth rolled forward and fell on the floor.

It was the head of the poor mandarin.

"Ah!" said Miss Unity with a long-drawn sigh, as though she were in sudden pain.

Pennie picked it up, and her godmother, replacing it gently, shut the cupboard door and took up her wool again. Her face was very grave, and the frown on her forehead had deepened, but Pennie knew by this time that Miss Unity was not cross when she looked like that, but sad. So, although there was something she wanted to say very much, she kept silence for a little while. Her thoughts went back to the day when Ethelwyn had broken the mandarin, and then to her plan for getting another, and how it had failed. When she reached this point she ventured to inquire gently:

"Where did the mandarin come from?"

"A long, long way off, my dear," replied Miss Unity, with a far-away look in her eyes as though she saw the distant country herself.

"Could another be got?" continued Pennie.

Her godmother looked inquiringly at her eager face.

"Another!" she repeated. "I suppose so. But I could never care about another."

"Not if it were just exactly the same?" persisted Pennie.

"It could not be the same to me," said Miss Unity; "but why do you ask, my dear?"

"Because," said Pennie, "we wanted to get you another one for a surprise—only—things happened—and we couldn't save enough money."

Miss Unity leant forward suddenly and kissed her little guest.

"I thank you quite as much for the thought, dear Pennie, as if you had done it," she said. "But I am glad you did not. There were reasons which made me fond of the old mandarin years and years ago. I do not think I should like to see a new one in his place."

Pennie and she were both silent. Miss Unity's thoughts had perhaps travelled to that far-off country where the mandarin had lived, but Pennie's were nearer home.

"Then," she said half aloud, "I suppose it really would be better to collect for Kettles."

The voice at her side woke Miss Unity from her day-dream. The last word fell on her ear.

"Kettles, my dear!" she said. "What do you want with kettles?"

"It's a person," explained Pennie, "a little girl. We saw her at old Nurse's. And Nancy wants to give her a new pair of boots and stockings."

"Does she live with old Nurse?" asked Miss Unity.

"Oh, no!" answered Pennie. "She only came in for the tea-leaves. She lives in Anchoranopally."

"Where?" said Miss Unity in a surprised voice.

"Oh!" cried Pennie with a giggle of amusement, "I forgot you wouldn't understand. Nancy and I always call it that when we talk together. It really is the 'Anchor and Hope Alley,' you know, turning out of the High Street close to the College."

Poor Miss Unity became more and more confused every moment. It all sounded puzzling and improper to her. "Kettles" coming in for tea-leaves, and living in "Anchoranopally." How could Pennie have become familiar with such a child?

"But—my dear—" she said faintly. "That's the very worst part of Nearminster. Full of dirty, wicked people. You ought to know nothing of such places. And I don't like to hear you mispronounce words, it might grow into a habit. It's not at all nice."

"We only call it so because Kettles did, you see," said Pennie. "She didn't look at all wicked, and old Nurse says her mother is a decent woman. Her face was rather dirty, perhaps. She's got a bad father. He drinks—like lots of the people at Easney—"

"I am sorry to hear," interrupted Miss Unity, drawing himself up, "that Mrs Margetts allowed you to see such a person at all, or to hear anything of her relations. I am afraid she forgot herself."

"She couldn't help it," said Pennie eagerly. "Nancy and I were at tea with her, and Kettles came in for the tea-leaves, and had some bread and honey. And we asked Nurse to let her come and see us again, and she said 'No, she knew her duty better.' So we've never seen her since, but we've always wanted to. Her real name is Keturah. Nurse says it's a Scripture name, but we think Kettles suits her best." Pennie stopped to take breath.

"The dean was saying only the other day," remarked Miss Unity stiffly, "that Anchor and Hope Alley is a scandal to Nearminster. A disgraceful place to be so near the precincts."

"Does he go to see the people in it?" asked Pennie.

"The *dean*, my dear! He has other and far more important matters to attend to. It would be most unsuitable to the dignity of his position."

"I knew Nancy was wrong," said Pennie with some triumph. "She thought he might know Kettles' father and mother, but I was quite sure he didn't. Does anyone go to see them?" she added.

"I have no doubt they are visited by people properly appointed for the purpose," said Miss Unity coldly; "and you see, Pennie, if they are good people they can come to church and enjoy all the church privileges as well as any one else."

Pennie was silent. She could not fancy Kettles coming to church in that battered bonnet and those big boots. What a noise she would make, and how everyone would look at her!

"Father goes to see the bad people in Easney as well as the good ones," she said, more to herself than her godmother. "Lots of them never come to church."

"Easney is quite different from a cathedral town," said Miss Unity with dignity.

And here the conversation ended, partly because Pennie had no answer to make to this statement, and partly because it was time to go to the evening service. It was a special service to-night, for a sermon was to be preached in aid of foreign missions by the Bishop of Karawayo. This was particularly interesting to Miss Unity, and though Pennie did not care about the bishop it was always a great pleasure to her to go to the Cathedral.

"May we go in through the cloisters?" she asked as they crossed the Close.

Miss Unity much preferred entering at the west door and thought the cloisters damp, but she willingly assented, for it was difficult for her to refuse Pennie anything.

There was something about the murky dimness of the cloisters which filled Pennie with a sort of pleasant awe. She shivered a little as she walked through them, not with cold, but because she fancied them thronged with unseen presences. How many, many feet must have trod those ancient flag-stones to have worn them into such waves and hollows. Perhaps they still went hurrying through the cloisters, and that was what made the air feel so thick with mystery, and why she was never inclined to talk while she was there.

Miss Unity always went as swiftly through the cloisters as possible; and Pennie, keeping close to her side, tried as she went along to make out the half-effaced inscriptions at her feet. There was one she liked specially, and always took care not to tread upon:

Jane Lister Deare Childe.
Aged 6 Years. 1629.

By degrees she had built up a history about this little girl, and felt that she knew her quite well, so that she was always glad to pass her resting-place and say something to her in her thoughts.

Through a very low-arched doorway—so low that Miss Unity had to bend her head to go under it—they entered the dimly-lighted Cathedral. Only the choir was used for the service, and the great nave, with its solemn marble tombs here and there, was half-dark and deserted. Pillars, shafts, and arches loomed indistinct yet gigantic, and seemed to rise up, up, up, till they were lost in a misty invisible region together with the sounds of the organ and the echoes of the choristers' voices.

The greatness and majesty of it all gave Pennie feelings which she did not understand and could not put into words; they were half pleasure and half pain, and quite prevented the service from being wearisome to her, as it sometimes was at Easney. She had so much to think of here. The Cathedral was so full of great people, from the crusader in his mailed armour and shield, to the mitred bishop with his crozier, lying so quietly on their tombs with such stern peaceful faces.

Pennie knew them all well, and in her own mind she decided that Bishop Jocelyne, who had built the great central tower hundreds of years ago, was a far nicer bishop to look at than the one who was preaching this evening. She tried to pay attention to the sermon, but finding that it was full of curious hard names and a great number of figures, she gave it up and settled comfortably into her corner to think her own thoughts. These proved so interesting that she was startled when she found the service over and Miss Unity groping for her umbrella.

Just outside the Cathedral they were overtaken by Mrs Merridew and her eldest daughter.

"Most interesting, was it not?" she observed to Miss Unity, "and casts quite a new light on the condition of those poor benighted creatures. The bishop is a charming man, full of information. The dean is delighted. He has always been so interested in foreign missions. The children think of having a collecting-box."

"Did you like the sermon, Pennie?" asked Miss Unity as they passed on; "I hope you tried to listen."

"I did—at first," said Pennie, "till all those names came. I liked the hymn," she added.

"Wouldn't it be nice for you to have a collecting-box at home," continued Miss Unity, "like the Merridews, so that you might help these poor people?"

Pennie hung her head. She felt sure she ought to wish to help them, but at the same time she did not want to at all. They lived so far-away, in places with names she could not even pronounce, and they were such utter strangers to her.

"Wouldn't you like it?" repeated her godmother anxiously.

Pennie took courage.

"You see," she said, "I haven't got much money—none of us have. And I know Kettles—at least I've seen her. And I know where Anchor and Hope Alley is, and that makes it so much nicer. And so I'd rather give it to her than to those other people, if you don't mind."

"Of course not, my dear," said Miss Unity. "It is your own money, and you must spend it as you like."

Pennie fancied there was a sound of disapproval in her voice, and in fact Miss Unity was a little disappointed. She had always felt it to be a duty to support missions and to subscribe to missionary societies, to attend meetings, and to make clothes for the native children in India. At that very time she was reading a large thick book about missions, which she had bought at the auction of the Nearminster book club. She read a portion every evening and kept a marker carefully in the place. She was sure that she, as well as the dean, was deeply interested in foreign missions. If she could have made them attractive to Pennie also, it might take the place of Kettles and Anchor and Hope Alley.

For Miss Unity thought this a much more suitable object, and one moreover which could be carried out without any contact with dirt and wickedness! Squalor and the miseries of poverty had always been as closely shut out of her life as they were from the trim prosperity of the precincts, and Miss Unity considered it fitting that they should be so. She knew that these squalid folk were there, close outside; she was quite ready to give other people money to help them, or to subscribe to any fund for their improvement or relief, but it had always seemed to her unbecoming and needless for a lady to know anything about the details of their lives.

The children's idea, therefore, of providing Kettles with new boots and stockings did not commend itself to her in the least. There were proper ways of giving clothes to the poor. If the child's mother was a decent woman, as old Nurse had said, she belonged to a clothing club and could get them for herself. If

she was not a respectable person, the less Pennie knew of her the better. At any rate Miss Unity resolved to do her best to discourage the project, and certainly Pennie was not likely to hear much, either at her house or the deanery, to remind her of Anchor and Hope Alley and its unfortunate inmates.

Pennie on her side, though a trifle discouraged by the coldness with which any mention of Kettles was received, felt that at least she had taken a step towards her further acquaintance. Very likely her godmother might come in time to approve of the idea and to wish to hear more about it. "I shall have something to tell Nancy at last," she said to herself when she woke up the next morning and remembered the conversation.

But she was not to see Nancy as soon as she thought. After breakfast Andrew arrived, not with the waggonette as usual to fetch Pennie home, but mounted on Ruby with a letter from Mrs Hawthorne to Miss Unity. Dickie was ill. It might be only a severe cold, her mother said, but there were cases of measles in the village, and she felt anxious. Would Miss Unity keep Pennie with her for the next few days? Further news should be sent to-morrow.

As she read this all sorts of plans and arrangements passed through Miss Unity's mind and stirred it pleasantly. She was sorry for Dickie and the others, but it was quite an excitement to her to think of keeping Pennie with her longer.

"Miss Penelope will remain here to-night," she said to Betty, "and probably for two or three days. Miss Delicia is ill, and they think it may be measles."

"Oh, indeed, Miss!" said Betty with a sagacious nod. "Then it'll go through all the children."

"Do you think so?" said Miss Unity, who had great faith in Betty's judgment. "Then it may be a matter of weeks?"

"Or months, Miss," replied Betty. "It depends on how they sicken."

"In that case I've been thinking," said Miss Unity timidly, "whether it would be better to put Miss Penelope into the little pink-chintz room."

"Well, it is more cheerful than the best room, Miss," said Betty condescendingly, "though it's small."

The pink-chintz room was a tiny apartment opening out of Miss Unity's. She had slept in it herself as a child, and though there was not much pink left in the chintz now, there were still some pictures and small ornaments remaining from that time. It had a pleasant look-out, too, on to the quiet green Close, and was altogether a contrast to the dark sombrely furnished room Pennie had been occupying. So after Betty had scoured and cleaned and aired as much as she thought fit, Pennie and all her small belongings were settled into the pink-chintz roomy and it turned out that her stay there was to be a long one. The news from Easney did not improve. Dickie certainly had the measles, the baby soon followed her example, and shortly afterwards Ambrose took it, so that Nancy and David were the only two down-stairs.

"What a good thing, my dear, that you were here!" said Miss Unity kindly to her guest. Pennie was obliged to answer "Yes" for the sake of politeness, but in truth she thought she would rather risk the measles and be at home.

Nearminster was nice in many ways and Miss Unity was kind, but it was so dreadfully dull as time went on to have no one of her own age to talk to about things. There were the Merridews, but in spite of Miss Unity's praises Pennie did not like them any better, and had not become more familiar with them. She had certainly plenty of conversation with her godmother, who did her best to sympathise except on the subject of Kettles; but nothing made up for the loss of Nancy and her brothers—not even the long letters which the former sent now and then from Easney, written in a bold sprawling hand, covering three sheets of paper, and a good deal blotted. Here is one of these epistles:—

"My dear Pennie,—Dickie got up and had chicken for dinner to-day, and was very frackshus. Ambrose is in bed still. He has Guy Manring read aloud to him, and he will toss his arms out of bed at the egsiting parts; so mother says she must leave off. David and I have lessons. David said yesterday he would rather have meesles than do his sums, so Miss Grey said he was ungrateful. I never play with the dolls now. If you were here we could play their having meesles, but it is no good alone. Baby had the meesles worst of all. Doctor Banks comes every day. He has a new grey horse. Have you been to see old Nurse lately? and have you seen Kettles? Dickie sends you these sugar kisses she made herself. She burnt her fingers and screamed for nearly an hour.—Your loving sister, Nancy Hawthorne."

Pennie answered these letters fully, and moreover, in case she might forget anything, she kept a diary, and wrote something in it at the end of each day. Sometimes there was so little to put down that she had to make some reflections, or copy a piece of poetry to fill it up; but it was a comfort to her to think that some day she should read it over with Nancy and Ambrose.

Meanwhile, this visit of Pennie's, which was to her a kind of exile, was a very different matter to Miss Unity. Day by day Pennie's comfort, Pennie's improvement, Pennie's pleasure filled her thoughts more and more, and it became strange to think of the time when the little pink-chintz room had been empty.

Chapter Eight.

Kettles Again.

Pennie sat one afternoon sewing wearily a way at a long seam. Sometimes she looked at the clock, sometimes out of the window, and sometimes dropped her work into her lap, until Miss Unity gave a grave look, and then she took it up and plodded on again.

For Miss Unity had discovered another point in which Pennie needed improvement. Her sewing was disgraceful! Now was the moment to take it in hand, for she had no lessons to learn and a great deal of spare time which could not be better employed; so it was arranged that one hour should be spent in "plain needlework" every afternoon.

"Every gentlewoman, my dear, should be apt at her needle," said Miss Unity with quiet firmness. "It is a branch of education as important in its way as any other, and I should grieve if you were to fail in it."

"But it does make me ache all over so," said poor Pennie.

"My dear Pennie, that must be fancy. Surely it is much more fatiguing to sit stooping over your writing so long, yet I never hear you complain."

"Well, but I like it, you see," answered Pennie, "so I suppose that's why I don't ache."

"It is neither good for you nor profitable to others," said Miss Unity seriously. "You may dislike your needle, but you cannot deny that it is more useful than your pen."

So Pennie submitted, and argued no more. With a view to making the work more attractive, her godmother gave her a new work-box with a shiny picture of the Cathedral on the lid. Every afternoon, with this beside her, Pennie, seated stiffly in a straight chair with her shoulders well pressed up against the back, passed an hour of great torture, which Miss Unity felt sure was of immense benefit to her.

The room in which they sat looked out into the Close. It increased Pennie's misery this afternoon to see how bright and pleasant everything was outside, how the sunlight played about the carved figures on the west front of the Cathedral, how the birds darted hither and thither, and how the fallen leaves danced and whirled in the breeze. Everything was gay and active, while she must sit fastened to that dreadful chair, and push her needle in and out of the unyielding stuff.

First the back of her neck ached, so that she felt she must poke her head out, and Miss Unity looking up, said, "Draw in your chin, my dear." Then she felt that she must at any cost kick out her legs one after the other, and Miss Unity said, "Don't fidget, my dear. A lady always controls her limbs." It was wonderful to see how long her godmother could sit quite still, and to hear her thimble go "click, click," so steadily with never a break. It was as constant as the tick of the clock on the mantel-piece. Would that small hand *never* reach the hour of three?

Nurse's proverb of a "watched kettle never boils" came into Pennie's mind, and she resolved not to look at the clock again until the hour struck. The word "kettle" made her think of Kettles and of Nancy's last letter, and she wondered whether Miss Unity would go to the College that afternoon, as she had half promised. Those thoughts carried her a good way down the seam, and meanwhile the hands of the clock crept steadily on until the first stroke of three sounded deeply from the Cathedral. Pennie jumped up, threw her work on the table, and stretched out her arms.

"Oh how glad I am!" she cried, spreading out her cramped fingers one by one. "And now, may we go and see old Nurse?"

Miss Unity looked up from her work, hesitating a little. Pennie was always making her do things at odd hours, upsetting the

usual course of events, and introducing all sorts of disturbing ideas.

"Well, dear," she said, "the morning is our time for walking, isn't it?"

"But this morning it rained," said Pennie; "and now look, only look, dear Miss Unity, how beautiful it is—do let us go."

She went close to her godmother and put her arm coaxingly round her neck. Miss Unity gave in at once.

"Well, then, we will go," she said, rising to look out of the window. "But it's very damp, Pennie. Put on goloshes, and a waterproof, for I think we shall have more rain."

Nothing could have shown Pennie's influence more strongly than Miss Unity's consenting to leave the house just after it had rained, or just before it was going to rain. Damp was dreadful, and mud was a sort of torture, but it had become worse than either to deny Pennie a pleasure, and they presently set out for the College shrouded in waterproofs, though the sun was now shining brightly.

Old Nurse was at home, and received them with great delight. Miss Unity and she had so much to say to each other about the measles at Easney, and other matters, that Pennie began to fear it might be difficult to get in a word upon any subject more interesting to herself. She was quite determined, however, to do it if possible, and the thought of how bold Nancy would be in like circumstances gave her courage. She would be bold too when the moment came, and she sat watching for it, her eyes fixed on Nurse's face, and a sentence all ready to thrust in at the first crevice in the conversation.

At last it came.

"Does Kettles' mother still come and scrub for you?" she asked, shooting out the sentence so suddenly that Miss Unity started.

"Lor', now, Miss Pennie, what a memory you have got to be sure!" exclaimed old Nurse with sincere admiration. "To think of your remembering that! No, she doesn't, poor soul, and I begin to doubt if she ever will again."

"Why?" asked Pennie breathlessly.

"She's been down with rheumatic fever these three weeks," said Nurse, shaking her head regretfully. "It's a poor woman who lives close by, Miss,"—turning to Miss Unity—"a very sad case."

"She knows," interrupted Pennie, for she thought it a great waste of time to explain matters all over again.

"My dear," corrected Miss Unity, "let Mrs Margetts speak."

"I run over to see her sometimes," continued old Nurse, "and take her a morsel of something, but it beats me to understand how those people live. There's five children, and the only person earning anything, laid on her back."

"Don't they get parish relief?" inquired Miss Unity with a look of distress. "They ought to have an allowance from the sick fund. Who visits them?"

"It's my belief," said old Nurse lowering her voice, "that no one ever goes nigh them at all. You see, Miss, the husband takes more than is good for him, and then he gets vi'lent and uses bad language. Of course the ladies who visit don't like that."

"I can quite understand it," said Miss Unity, drawing herself up.

"Of course you can, Miss," said old Nurse soothingly. "Now I don't mind him at all myself. I don't take any count of what he says, and I always think 'hard words break no bones;' but it's different for such as you."

"Who looks after the poor thing while she's so ill and helpless?" asked Miss Unity, taking out her purse.

"That's the wonder of it," said Nurse. "The eldest's a girl of Miss Pennie's age, but not near so big. That child would shame many grown-up people, Miss, by the way she carries on. Nurses her mother and looks after the children, (there's a baby in arms), and she's on her feet from morning till night. If it wasn't for Kettles they'd all have been in the workhouse long ago."

Miss Unity here offered some money, but Nurse shook her head sagely.

"No use to give 'em money, Miss. He'd get hold of it and drink it in no time."

"Well, you must spend it for the poor woman in the way you think best," said Miss Unity, "and let me know when you want more."

Pennie had listened eagerly to every word. Here indeed was news of Kettles and her family at last. How interested Nancy would be!

"Oh!" she exclaimed, taking her godmother's hand, "do let me go to see them with Nurse and take them the things she buys."

But to this Miss Unity would not listen for a moment. She would not even consider such a thing possible. All she would promise was that they would soon come again to the College and hear from Mrs Margetts how the poor woman was getting on, and with this Pennie was obliged to be contented.

Miss Unity herself was strangely stirred and interested by what she had been told. The story of Kettles and her mother seemed to cast a different light on Anchor and Hope Alley, that "scandal to Nearminster," as the dean had called it. She had always considered it the abode of outcasts and wickedness, but surely it could not be right that these people should remain uncared for and un comforted in sickness and want. They were surrounded by clergymen, district visitors, schools, churches, societies of all sorts established on purpose for their help, and yet here was Kettles' mother three weeks down with the rheumatism, and only a little child to look after her. What did it mean?

And then, Miss Unity went on to think, her mind getting tangled with perplexity, what of their spiritual privileges? The great Cathedral lifted its spire and pointed heavenwards in vain for them, so near, yet so very far-off. The peace and rest of its solemn silence, the echo of its hymn and praise were useless; it was an unknown land to Anchor and Hope Alley. They were as much shut out from all it had to give as those dusky inhabitants of another country with whose condition Nearminster had lately been concerned. Pennie's words occurred to Miss Unity. "I know Anchor and Hope Alley, and that makes it so much nicer." She looked down at her side—where was Pennie?

Now while Miss Unity had been walking along in silence, her mind full of these thoughts and her eyes turned absently away from outward things, Pennie had been sharply observant of all that was going on in the High Street through which they were passing. Nothing escaped her, and the minute before Miss Unity noted her absence she had caught sight of a familiar figure in

the distance, and had dashed across the road without a thought of consequences. When her godmother's startled glance discovered her she was standing at the entrance of Anchor and Hope Alley, and by her side was a figure of about her own height.

And what a figure! Three weeks of nursing, scrubbing, minding children and running errands had not improved poor Kettles' appearance. The same old bonnet, which Pennie remembered, hung back from her head, but it was more crushed and shapeless; the big boots had large holes in them, and the bony little hand, which clasped a bottle to her chest, was more like a black claw than ever. When Miss Unity reached them the children were staring at each other in silence, Pennie rather shy, and Kettles with a watchful glimmer in her eyes as though prepared to defend herself if necessary. Miss Unity took Pennie's hand.

"My dear," she said breathlessly, "how could you? I was so alarmed."

"This is Kettles," was Pennie's answer, "and she says her mother isn't any better."

"Don't you belong to the Provident Club?" asked Miss Unity, with a faint hope that Nurse might have been wrong.

"No, 'um," said Kettles, looking up at the strange lady.

"Nor the Clothing Club, nor the Coal Club? Does nobody visit your mother?" asked Miss Unity again.

"Nobody don't come 'cept Mrs Margetts from the College," said Kettles. "Father says—"

"Oh, never mind that!" said Miss Unity hastily, "we don't want to know."

"Please let her talk," put in Pennie beseechingly. "Father says," continued Kettles, her sharp eyes glancing rapidly from one face to the other, "as how he won't have no 'strict ladies in *his* house; nor no pa'sons nuther," she added.

As these last dreadful words passed Kettles' lips the dean, rosy and smiling, went by on the other side arm in arm with another clergyman. Could he have heard them? He gave a look of surprise at the group as he took off his hat. Poor Miss Unity felt

quite unnerved by this unlucky accident, and hardly knew what to say next.

"But—" she stammered, "that isn't kind or—or nice, of your father, when they want to come and see you and do you good."

"Father says he doesn't want doing good to," said Kettles, shutting her lips with a snap.

Miss Unity felt incapable of dealing further with Kettles' father. She changed the subject hurriedly.

"What have you in that bottle?" she asked. "It would be better to spend your money on bread."

"Oils to rub mother with," answered Kettles with a pinched smile; then with a business-like air she added, "I can't stop talking no longer, she's alone 'cept the children. If the baby was to crawl into the fire she couldn't move to stop him, not if he was burnt ever so."

Without further leave-taking she dived down the dark alley at a run, her big boots clattering on the flag-stones.

Pennie felt very glad to have met and talked to Kettles at last, and as she and her godmother went on, she made up her mind to write to Nancy that very night and tell her all about it; also to write a long description of the meeting in her diary. She was just putting this into suitable words when Miss Unity spoke.

"I have thought of something, Pennie, that would be nice for you to do for that little girl—Keturah her name is, I think."

"She's never called by it," said Pennie. "Don't you think Kettles suits her best, and it's far easier to say."

"Not to me!" answered Miss Unity. "I do not like the name at all. But what I want to suggest is this; you are anxious to do something for her, are you not?"

"I told you about it, you know," said Pennie seriously. "Nancy and I mean to collect for some boots and stockings. Did you see her boots? I should think they must have been her father's, shouldn't you?"

"I don't wish to think about her father in any way," said Miss Unity with a slight shudder, "but I should like to do something for the poor mother and the little girl. Now it seems to me that

we could not do better than make her a set of underlinen. I would buy the material, Betty would cut out the clothes from patterns of yours, and you and I would make them. This would give you an object for your needlework, and you would not find it so wearisome perhaps."

She spoke quite eagerly, for she felt that she had hit upon an excellent scheme which would benefit both Pennie and Keturah. It was new and interesting, besides, to take an independent step of this kind instead of subscribing to a charity, as she had hitherto done when she wished to help people.

It may be questioned whether Pennie looked upon the plan with equal favour, but she welcomed it as a sign that Miss Unity was really beginning to take an interest in Kettles. She would have preferred the interest to show itself in any other way than needlework, but it was much better than none at all, and, "I should have to work anyway," she reflected.

"I don't see why, Pennie," said her godmother hesitatingly, "we should not buy the material this afternoon."

Pennie could see no reason against it, in fact it seemed natural to her that after you had thought of a thing you should go and do it at once. To Miss Unity, however, used to weigh and consider her smallest actions, there was something rash and headlong in it.

"Perhaps we had better think it over and do it to-morrow," she said, pausing at the door of a linen-draper's shop.

"Kettles wants clothes very badly," said Pennie, "and I shall be a long while making them. I should think we'd better get it now. But shall you go to Bolton's?" she added; "mother always goes to Smith's."

"Bolton's" was a magnificent place in Pennie's eyes. It was the largest shop in the High Street, and she had heard her mother call it extravagantly dear. Miss Unity, however, would not hear of going anywhere else. She had always dealt at Bolton's; they supplied the materials for the Working Societies and the choristers' surplices, and had always given satisfaction. So Pennie, with rather an awed feeling, followed her godmother into the shop, and was soon much interested in her purchases; also in the half-confidential and wholly respectful remarks made from time to time across the counter by Mrs Bolton, who had bustled forward to serve them. Her husband was a verger at the

Cathedral, and this justified her in expressing an interest from a discreet distance in all that went on there.

"Quite a stir in the town since the bishop's sermon, Miss," she remarked as she placed a pile of calico on the counter. "I think this will suit your purpose—if not too fine."

"I was thinking of unbleached," said Miss Unity, "such as we use for the Working Societies. Yes, it was a very fine sermon."

Mrs Bolton retired into the back of the shop, and reappeared with a boy carrying another large bale.

"This will be the article then," she said, unrolling it, "and certainly more suitable too. Yes, there's nothing talked of now but the missions. Is he a coloured gentleman, do you know, Miss, or does the climate produce that yellow look he has? Six yards, *and* some Welsh flannel. Thank you."

It was rather alarming to Pennie to see such quantities of calico measured off without shape or make, and to think how far her needle would have to travel before it took the form of clothes for Kettles. She sat soberly eyeing it, and following the rapid course of Mrs Bolton's scissors.

"I wish I could work as fast as she cuts," she thought to herself, "they'd be ready in no time."

"You'll no doubt be present at the Institute on Friday, Miss," resumed Mrs Bolton after the flannel was disposed of. "I'm told the dissolving views will be something quite out of the common. This is a useful width in tape."

"I will take two pieces of the narrow, thank you," said Miss Unity, "and that will be all. Yes, I think perhaps I may go."

"What did she mean by dissolving views?" asked Pennie on the way home.

"They are coloured pictures, my dear;" said her godmother after some consideration, "which fade imperceptibly one into the other."

"Are they like a magic lantern?" continued Pennie. "What are the pictures about?"

"Various subjects," answered Miss Unity; "but these will represent scenes from the Karawayo Islands. There is to be a missionary address."

"Haven't we done a lot this afternoon?" said Pennie, as they turned into the Close. "Lots we never meant to do."

It was true indeed as far as Miss Unity was concerned; she had seldom spent such an afternoon in her life. She had been taken out for a walk in the mud, with rain threatening; she had talked in the open High Street, under the very eye of the dean, with a little vagrant out of Anchor and Hope Alley; she had of her own accord, unadvised and unassisted, formed an original plan, and not only formed it, but taken the first step towards carrying it out. Miss Unity hardly knew herself and felt quite uncertain what she might do next, and down what unknown paths she might find herself hurrying. In spite, however, of some fatigue and a sense of confusion in the head, she sat down to tea in a cheerful and even triumphant spirit.

Pennie, too, had a great deal to think over after she had written to Nancy, and made a careful entry in her diary. It had been such a nice afternoon, and it came just when she had been feeling a little discontented and tired of Nearminster. There were the dissolving views, too.

Did Miss Unity mean to take her to the Institute on Friday? Pennie had been to very few entertainments. The circus at Easney, and the fair at Cheddington made up her experience, and she thought she should like to go very much. The address would not be very interesting if it were like the bishop's sermon, but the pictures fading one into the other had a beautiful sound; and then it was to be in the evening, which would involve stopping up late, and this was in itself agreeable and unusual. She went to sleep with this on her mind, and it was the first thing she thought of in the morning.

When she entered the breakfast-room her godmother was reading a note.

"Pennie, my dear," she said, "here is a very kind invitation from the deanery. We are asked to go there to tea, and afterwards to see the dissolving views at the Institute."

Pennie sat down very soberly at the table. All the pleasure to be got out of the dissolving views would be spoilt if they were to be preceded by such a trial.

"You will like that, won't you?" said Miss Unity anxiously.

"I'd much rather be going alone with you," said Pennie.

"That's very nice of you," answered Miss Unity with a gratified smile; "but I expect some of the Merridew girls are going too, and I know it is natural for you to enjoy being with your young friends."

"They're not exactly friends, you see," said Pennie thoughtfully; "although, of course, I do know them, because I see them every week at the dancing. But there's nothing we care to talk about."

"That will come in time," said Miss Unity encouragingly.

Pennie did not contradict her, but she felt sure in her own mind that it would never come, and she now looked forward to Friday with very mixed feelings. "I only hope I shall have tea in the school-room," she said to herself, "because then I sha'n't see the dean."

But things turned out unfortunately, for when Miss Unity and Pennie, in their best dresses, arrived on Friday evening at the deanery they were both shown into the drawing-room. There were a good many guests assembled, and two of the girls were there, but the first person who caught Pennie's eye was the dean himself, standing on the rug, coffee-cup in hand, smiling and talking. She shrank into the background as much as she could, and sat down by Sabine Merridew in the shelter of a curtain, hoping that no one would notice her in this retired position.

And at first this seemed likely, for everyone had a great deal to say to each other, and there was a general buzz of conversation all over the room. Pennie soon grew secure enough to listen to what the dean was saying to Miss Unity, who had taken a seat near him. He stood before her with upraised finger, while she, fearful of losing a word, neglected her tea and refused any kind of food, gazing at him with rapt attention.

This missionary address at the Institute, he was telling her, was an idea of his own. He wanted to keep up the impression made by the bishop's sermon. "That, my dear Miss Unity," he said, "is our great difficulty—not so much to make the impression as to keep it up. To my mind, you know, that's a harder matter than just to preach one eloquent sermon and go away. The bishop's lighted the torch and we must keep it burning—keep it burning—"

"Sabine," said Mrs Merridew, raising her voice, "has Penelope any cake?"

The dean caught the name at once.

"What!" he said, looking round, "is my old friend Miss Penelope there?"

The dreaded moment had come. How Pennie wished herself anywhere else!

"And how," said the dean, gently stirring his coffee and preparing to be facetious—"how does that long job of needlework get on, Mrs Penelope?"

Did he mean Kettles' clothes? Pennie wondered. How could he know?

"I've only just begun," she answered nervously, twisting her hands together.

There was such a general sound of subdued laughter at this from the guests, who had all kept silence to listen to the dean's jokes, that Pennie saw she had said something silly, though she had no idea what it could be. All the faces were turned upon her with smiles, and the dean, quite ignorant of the misery he was causing her, drank up his coffee well pleased.

"And so," he continued, as he put down his cup, "you're going to see the dissolving views. And are you as much interested in the Karawayo missions as my young folks?"

Poor Pennie! She was a rigidly truthful child, and she knew there could be only one answer to this question. Miss Unity had told her that the Merridew girls were very much interested, whereas she knew she was not interested at all. Deeply humiliated, and flushing scarlet, she replied in a very small voice, "No."

The dean raised his eyebrows.

"Dear me, dear me!" he said, pretending to be shocked. "How's this, Miss Unity? We must teach your god-daughter better."

Pennie felt she could not bear to be held up to public notice much longer. The hot tears rose in her eyes; if the dean asked her any more questions she was afraid she should cry, and that,

at her age, with everyone looking at her, would be a lasting disgrace.

At this moment sympathy came from an unexpected quarter. A hand stole into hers, and Sabine's voice whispered:

"Don't mind. I don't care for them either."

It was wonderfully comforting. Pennie gulped down her tears and tried to smile her thanks, and just then general attention was turned another way. Some one asked Dr Merridew if he were going to the Institute that evening.

"I'm extremely sorry to say no," he replied, his smiles disappearing, and his lips pursed seriously together. "Important matters keep me at home. But I much regret it."

All the guests much regretted it also, except Pennie, who began to feel a faint hope that she might after all enjoy herself if the dean were not going too.

The party set out a little later to walk to the Institute, which was quite a short distance off.

"May I sit by you?" asked Pennie, edging up to her newly-found friend, Sabine.

She was a funny little girl, rather younger than Nancy, with short black curls all over her head, and small twinkling eyes. Pennie had always thought she liked her better than the others, and now she felt sure of it.

"Do you like dissolving views or magic lanterns best?" she went on.

"Magic lanterns much," said Sabine promptly. "You see dissolving views are never funny at all. They're quite serious and *teachy*."

"What are they about?" asked Pennie.

"Oh! sunsets, and palm-trees, and natives, and temples, and things like that," said Sabine. "I don't care about them at all, but Joyce likes them, so perhaps you will."

"Why do you come, if you don't like them?" asked Pennie.

"Because it's my turn and Joyce's," said Sabine. "We always go to things in twos; there are six of us, you see."

"So there are of us," said Pennie, "only Baby doesn't count because she's too young to go to things. There isn't often anything to go to in Easney, but when there is we all five go at once. Dickie wouldn't be left out for anything."

By the time the Institute was reached they had become quite confidential, and Pennie had almost forgotten her past sufferings in the pleasure of finding a companion nearer her own age than Miss Unity. She told Sabine all about her life at home, the ages of her brothers and sisters, and their favourite games and pets.

She was indeed quite sorry when the missionary began his address, and they were obliged to be silent and listen to him, for she would have been more interested in continuing the conversation. It was, however, so pleasant to have found a friend that other things did not seem to matter so much; even when the dissolving views turned out to be dull in subject though very dazzling in colour she bore the disappointment calmly, and that evening she added in her diary, "By this we see that things never turn out as we expect them to."

Miss Unity might have said the same. It was strange to remember how she had dreaded Pennie's visits, for now it was almost equally dreadful to think of her going home. Little by little something had sprung up in Miss Unity's life which had been lying covered up and hidden from the light for years. Pennie's unconscious touch had set it free to put forth its green leaves and blossoms in the sunshine. How would it flourish without her?

Chapter Nine.

Dr Budge.

We must now leave Pennie at Nearminster for a while and return to Easney, where things had been quite put out of their usual order by the arrival of the measles. The whole house was upset and nothing either in nursery or school-room went on as usual, for everything had to give way to the invalids.

There was always someone ill. First Dickie, who took it "very hard," Nurse said. Then just as she was getting better the baby sickened, and before anxiety was over about her, Ambrose began to complain and shortly took to his bed. Only Nancy and David showed no signs of it, and to their great annoyance had to continue their lessons as usual, and share in none of the privileges of being ill.

They were particularly jealous of Ambrose, who seemed to have all manner of treats just now—mother reading aloud to him the sort of books he liked best, cook making jellies for him, and Nurse constantly to be met on the stairs carrying something very nice on a tray. Nancy and David not only felt themselves to be of no importance at all, but if they made the least noise in the house they were at once sharply rebuked. They began to think it was their turn to be petted and coaxed, and have everyone waiting on them; but to their own disappointment and the relief of the household their turn never came, and they remained in the most perfect health.

Perhaps Ambrose, in spite of all his privileges, did not feel himself much to be envied. It was nice, of course, to have mother reading *Ivanhoe* aloud, and to be surrounded by attention, and for everyone to be so particularly kind, but there were other things that were not nice. It was not nice to have such bad headaches, or to lie broad awake at night and feel so hot, and try in vain to find a cool place in bed. And it was not nice to have such funny dreams, half awake and half asleep, in which he was always fighting or struggling with something much stronger than himself.

Through all these conflicts he had a confused sense that if he overcame his enemy his father would trust him again, for since the adventure of the crock the vicar's words had always been on Ambrose's mind. He had been continually on the look-out for some great occasion in which he might prove that he was trustworthy, and now that he was feverish and ill this idea haunted him in all sorts of strange shapes. Sometimes it was a tall black knight in mailed armour, with whom he must fight single-handed; sometimes a great winged creature covered with scales; sometimes a swift thing like a lizard which he tried to catch and could not, and which wearied him by darting under rocks and through crevices where he could not follow.

But whatever shape they took, in one respect Ambrose's dreams were always alike—he was never successful. Always striving, and pursuing, and fighting, and never victorious, it was no wonder that he was worn out and quite exhausted when

morning came. As he got better, and the fever left him, the dreams left him too, but the idea that had run through them was still there, and he thought about it a great deal.

What could he do to make his father trust him? He pondered over this question in his own mind without talking of it to anyone. If Pennie had been there he could have told her about it, but he knew Nancy would only laugh, so he kept it to himself and it got stronger every day. This was partly because he had so much more time than usual on his hands, before he was considered quite well enough to go into the school-room and employ himself with the others. He was allowed, however, to sit up and to read as many story-books as he liked. They were full of stirring adventure and hairbreadth escape. It was quite a common everyday thing in them for a boy to save a person's life and risk his own. Why could not something of the same nature happen at Easney?

Certainly it was a very quiet place, with no wild animals or dangerous mountains, but still there might be a chance even at Easney of doing something remarkable. Dickie might tumble into a pond and he might save her life—only there was no water deep enough to drown her, and if there were he could not swim. Or the house might catch fire. That would do better. It would be in the night, and Ambrose would be the only one awake, and would have to rouse his father, who slept at the other end of the house. He would wrap himself in a blanket, force his way through smothering smoke and scorching flames, cross over burning planks with bare feet, climb up a blazing flight of stairs just tottering before they fell with a crash, and finally stand undismayed at his father's side. Then he could say quietly, "Father, the house is on fire, but do not be alarmed;" and his father would soon put everything right. After which he would turn to Ambrose and say, "My son, you have saved our lives by your courage and presence of mind. Henceforth I know that I can trust you."

How easy and natural all this seemed in fancy!

It was late in October when the doctor paid his last visit to the Vicarage and declared everyone to be quite well again, but he advised change of air for Dickie, who did not get very strong. Shortly afterwards, therefore, it was settled that she and the baby should go away for a month with Mr and Mrs Hawthorne. This would leave only Ambrose, Nancy, and David at home with Miss Grey, and the nursery would be empty, which seemed a very strange state of things. But there was something else settled which was stranger still to Ambrose, and he hardly knew

if he liked or dreaded it. He was to go every morning to learn Latin with Dr Budge.

Although it was strange, it was not a new idea, only it had been talked of so long that he had come to feel it would never really happen. He knew how vexed his father was that he could not give more regular time and attention to teaching him Latin. When he knocked at the study door with his books under his arm, it often happened that the vicar would be full of other business, and say, "I can't have you this morning, Ambrose, we must do double another day." But when the next time came it was often the same thing over again, so that Ambrose's Latin did not get on much.

Lately his father had said more often than ever, "I really will try to arrange with Dr Budge," and now it had actually been done.

Now Dr Budge was an old book-worm, supposed to be engaged in writing some mighty and learned work, who lived in a cottage on the Nearminster road. The children knew it and its owner very well, for it was not more than half a mile from the rectory, and they passed it whenever they drove into Nearminster. Its casement window was generally open, so that they could see him bending over his papers with his greenish wig pushed back from his forehead, and his large nose almost touching the top of his pen. The doctor was a tall, portly person with a red face, and had the air of being deeply occupied with some inward subject, so that he could spare no attention to outward things.

When he came to see their father, to whom he paid long visits, the children never expected him to notice them, or even to know them apart from each other, though he must have seen them so often. If the doctor ventured on a name it was always the wrong one, and lately he seemed to think it best to call them all "David," which saved trouble and which no one thought of correcting.

And now he was to be Ambrose's master. There was something rather awful in it, though at the same time there was a good deal to be proud of in having a master all to one's self. Ambrose wondered what Pennie would think of it, and wished she were at home that he might hear her opinion.

"Of course he'll call you 'David,'" said Nancy, "and I should think he'd often forget you're in the room at all. Wouldn't that be fun?"

"Father's going to take me to see him to-morrow," said Ambrose. "Perhaps if he says very plainly 'This is my son *Ambrose*,' Dr Budge will remember."

"Not a bit likely," said Nancy. "He met me in the garden the last time he was here, and said, 'How are you, David?' Now you know I'm not a bit like David. I don't believe he sees us at all when he looks at us."

"I think," said Ambrose, "that when people are very wise and know a great deal, that perhaps they always get like that."

"Then I like silly people best," said Nancy; but I don't believe that's true. Father's as wise as he can be, and he always knows people apart, and calls them by their right names.

On their way to the doctor's house the next day the vicar told Ambrose that it was a great honour and advantage to have such a master as Dr Budge.

"I hope you will always remember," he said, "that he is a great scholar and a very wise man, and that it is extremely kind of him to be willing to teach a little boy like you. It is out of friendship for me that he does it, and I think I can trust you to do your best, and at any rate not to give him more trouble than you need."

The word "trust" caught Ambrose's attention, and while his father went on talking he began to make all sorts of resolutions in his own mind. In this way he might show him what he could do, and regain his good opinion. He saw himself working so hard, and learning so fast, that Dr Budge would be struck with amazement. Nothing would be too difficult, no lesson too long. By the time they reached the doctor's gate Ambrose was master of the Latin tongue, and receiving praise and admiration from all his relations.

But now he had to come back to reality and to face his new master, who was a very solid fact, and he walked in by his father's side rather soberly. Everything was quite new and strange, for he had never been inside the cottage before.

They were shown straight into the study where the doctor sat at work. It was a long low room with a window at each end, one of which looked into the road and one into the little garden. The walls were lined with shelves, but there was not nearly enough room in them for the books, which had overflowed everywhere, on the table, on the chairs, on the window-seat, and on the

floor, where they stood in great piles on each side of the doctor. He seemed to be quite built in with books as he sat at his writing, and rose from among them with difficulty to greet his visitors, stumbling as he advanced to shake hands.

Ambrose noticed with awe that he looked bigger indoors, and that his head almost touched the low ceiling when he stood upright.

"This is Ambrose," said the vicar, "your future pupil."

Ambrose held out his hand, but the doctor took no notice of it. He put one large finger under the boy's chin and turned his face upwards.

"Shall we make a scholar of you?" he asked in a deep voice.

Ambrose blinked helplessly up into the broad face so high above him, as much dazzled and confused as though he had been trying to stare at the sun.

His father laughed. "You will find him very ignorant, I fear," he said; "but I think he will be industrious."

"We shall see, we shall see," said the doctor, and his small eyes twinkled kindly. "By the way," he said, suddenly turning from Ambrose and lifting a great volume from the pile on the floor, "here is the passage I spoke of the other day."

They both bent over the book with such earnest attention that Ambrose knew they would say nothing more about him for some time. Much relieved, he edged himself on to the corner of a chair that was not quite covered with books and papers, and looked round him.

Many curious things caught his eye, huddled together without any order on the mantel-piece, and among the books on the window-seat—fossils and odd-looking shells, cobwebby bottles, in which floated strange objects without shape or make. Splendid things for a museum, thought Ambrose, as his eyes roved among them, but how dusty and untidy, and no labels. How careful he and David had been to keep their museum neat and well arranged! The poor museum! Since the unlucky venture with the crock there had not been one single curiosity added to it. Disgrace seemed to hang over it, and it was seldom spoken of among the children at all.

Dr Budge's curiosities brought all this back to Ambrose's mind, and he quite longed to dust and label them for him. He might be a very learned man, but he certainly was not an orderly one.

Coming to this conclusion, he turned his eyes to the window and discovered something there which interested him still more, for in a wicker cage above the doctor's head there was a lively little jackdaw. He was a smart active bird with glossy plumage, and looked strangely out of place amongst the quiet old brown books and dusty objects in the room. Ambrose gazed at him with satisfaction. He had a jackdaw at home, and when he saw this one he felt at once that he and his future master would have one thing in common if they both liked jackdaws. The bird's presence made him feel less shy and strange, so that Dr Budge was no longer quite such an awful person, and when he said good-bye he was able to look up at him of his own accord.

After this the day soon came when father, mother, Dickie, baby, and nurse were all driven off to the station with their boxes, and parcels, and bundles of shawls. Added to these, all sorts of toys were handed in at the last moment, which could not be packed, and which Dickie refused to leave behind. She had been allowed to have her own way more than ever since her illness, and now when she wanted to take all sorts of unreasonable things no one liked to oppose her. The black kitten was to go also, she had settled, but it was nowhere to be found when the party was starting, David having wisely shut it up in the museum. Andrew drove off quickly to catch the train, and the last to be seen of Dickie was a kicking struggling form in Nurse's arms, and a face heated with anger.

The house seemed strangely dull and empty when they were really gone, but perhaps Ambrose felt it least, for he had his new lessons to fill his thoughts, and his mind was firmly fixed on making wonderful progress before his father came back.

After one or two lessons, however, this did not seem such a very easy thing to do, for he soon began to find out how very little he knew, and to have a dim idea that there was an enormous quantity to learn.

What a wonderful lot Dr Budge must know, and he seemed to be always learning more! When he was not actually occupied with Ambrose's lessons he was so entirely taken up with his own writing that Nancy's remark was perhaps true—he had forgotten his pupil altogether!

And yet, when Ambrose said the lesson he had prepared, or ventured to ask some question about the exercise he was doing, Dr Budge's mind came back at once from its own pursuits. He gave the most earnest attention to Ambrose's little difficulties, and did not rest till he was sure that they were cleared away; then he took up his squeaking quill-pen again, gave a push to his wig, and scribbled away harder than ever.

During these hours of study the jackdaw's presence was a relief both to Ambrose and his master, though in a different way. As he sat opposite the cage, with one elbow on the table and his head resting on his hand, Ambrose would raise his eyes from his grammar to the wicker cage with a feeling of sympathy. He and Jack were both shut up in cages, only that Jack had no Latin to learn.

But the doctor went further than this. Sometimes he came to a stand-still in his writing, murmured to himself, frowned, walked heavily up and down the room, but found no way out of the difficulty. Then, as a last resource, he would open the door of Jack's cage and invite him to perch on his finger. Jack would step jauntily down, raising all the grey feathers on his head till it was twice its usual size. Absently, but with great tenderness, the doctor would scratch it with one large forefinger; then, suddenly, the word or sentence he sought returning to his mind, he would bundle Jack into his cage, snatch up his pen, and begin to write furiously. Jack never failed to repay him by a vicious dig at his hand, which was sometimes successful, but this the doctor never seemed to notice.

"Though," thought Ambrose as he watched all this in silence, "it must hurt him, because I know how hard jackdaws peck."

He would have liked a little conversation on the subject with his master, for he felt that though he did not know much Latin, he could hold his own about jackdaws. There had been many at the Vicarage, which had all come to unexpected or dreadful ends, and Ambrose was thoroughly acquainted with their ways and habits.

But he was still far too much in awe of Dr Budge to venture on any subject apart from his lessons, and he contented himself with watching him and his bird with the closest interest.

They were an odd pair of friends. One so trim and neat, with such slender legs and such a glossy black toilette; the other so crumpled and shabby, with no regard for appearances at all, and his clothes never properly brushed. As he held himself

upright on the doctor's finger, the jackdaw had the air of considering himself far the superior being.

Things went on in this way for about a fortnight, and Ambrose felt quite as strange and far-away from Dr Budge as the day he had begun his lessons, when something happened which changed his ideas very much.

One morning, arriving at his usual hour with his books under his arm, and his exercise carefully written out, he was surprised to find the study empty. The doctor's chair was pushed back from the table as though he had risen hastily, and his pen was lying across his paper, where it had made a great blot of ink.

Lifting his eyes to the cage in the window, Ambrose saw that that was empty also; the little door was open, and there was no smart, active figure within. What did it all mean? While he was wondering, the doctor came slowly into the room with a troubled frown on his brow.

He greeted Ambrose, and sat down in his usual seat, but there was evidently something amiss with him, although he was as attentive as ever to his pupil's needs. Ambrose noticed, however, that when he had done saying his lessons, and had an exercise to write by himself, Dr Budge could not settle down as usual to his own work. After a short time he began to sigh and fidget, and then took his usual heavy walk up and down the room, stopping from force of habit at the jackdaw's cage, and half raising his hand as though to invite him to come out. When he had seen this several times, Ambrose longed to ask, "Is the jackdaw lost?" for he now began to feel sure this was the case. It was quite natural, he thought; jackdaws always did get lost, and he knew what a trouble it was sometimes to get them back. If the doctor would only talk about it he might be able to help him, but he had not the courage to open the subject himself.

So he went on with his lessons in silence, but by the time the hour came for him to go away, he had said the words over so often to himself that they seemed to come out without any effort of his own.

"Please, sir, have you lost the jackdaw?"

The doctor looked across the table. There was Ambrose's eager little face all aglow with sympathy and interest.

"I'm afraid so," he answered. "And what I fear is, that he has flown out of the window into the road. There is no trace of him in the garden."

"Was his wing cut?" inquired Ambrose, drawing nearer and looking up at the empty cage.

The doctor shook his head.

"Then, you see," said Ambrose gravely and instructively, "it'll be much more difficult to find him. He can fly ever so far, and even if he wanted to get back he might lose his way. Jackdaws always ought to have their wings cut."

"Ought they?" said the doctor humbly. He and his pupil seemed to have changed places. It was now Ambrose who took the lead, for he felt himself on firm ground.

"We lost two that hadn't got their wings cut," he continued, "so now we always cut their wings."

The doctor listened with the greatest respect, and seemed to weigh the matter in his mind. Then he said rather uncertainly:

"But how about the cats?"

Ambrose admitted that danger, but was still sure of his first point. It was best to cut a jackdaw's wing.

"I wonder," he said, looking at the other window, "if you're quite sure he's not in the garden. P'r'aps he's up in some tree."

The doctor shook his head.

"The garden has been thoroughly searched," he said. "There are very few trees there."

"Might I look?" asked Ambrose eagerly. Dr Budge meekly led the way into his little garden. Certainly there was not much room in it for the jackdaw to hide, and it only needed a glance to see that he was not there. The only possible place was in a large old medlar-tree which stood in the middle of the grass plot, with a wooden bench and table under it. It was nearly bare of leaves now, and a few sparrows were hopping about in its branches. Ambrose turned his eyes to the roof of a barn which ran along one side of the garden.

"P'r'aps he's flown over into the farm-yard," he said.

"I sent there early this morning," replied the doctor dejectedly, "and no one had seen the bird."

Big and learned as he was, he looked so cast, down that Ambrose forgot that he had ever been afraid of him, and only desired to give him comfort and help.

"Does he know the garden well?" he asked.

Dr Budge nodded. "His cage has often hung in the medlar-tree in the summer," he said, "when I've been sitting out here."

"Let's hang it there now," said Ambrose, "and p'r'aps if he gets hungry he'll come back to where he's been fed."

The doctor seemed a little cheered by this suggestion, and with Ambrose's help the cage was soon fixed in a good position in the medlar-tree, where the jackdaw could not fail to see it if he came back. All his favourite delicacies in the shape of food were then placed in it, and by this time it was long past Ambrose's usual hour for going home.

As they said good-bye, Dr Budge's eyes rested on him with a new expression. Ambrose felt sure he would never mistake him for David again, and would have confidence in his opinion for the future, at any rate about jackdaws. All the way home his mind was busy with plans for getting back the lost bird.

Chapter Ten.

A Friend In Need.

Ambrose told the story of the doctor's jackdaw at dinner-time to Miss Grey, Nancy, and David, who were all very much interested. The two latter began at once to recall memories of all the jackdaws who had lived at the Vicarage.

"Do you remember the one which flew away in the gale?" said Nancy. "David doesn't, of course. The wind blew the roof right off his house in the night, and we never saw him again."

"The next one was the one which swallowed a thimble," said David—"and died. And then mother said we mustn't have any more jackdaws. I remember that one."

"No," corrected Nancy, "that wasn't the next. The next was the one which got away for three days, and then the postman brought it back. Then came the one that swallowed the thimble, and then, the day after mother had said we were not to have another there came a strange one to Andrew's cottage, and he brought it here for us."

There was a little dispute about the order in which the jackdaws came, which led the conversation quite away from the doctor's loss. But after dinner, when the children were in the garden, Ambrose began to talk of it again.

"I wish," he said to David, "we could think of a way to help him to get it back."

David did not answer at first. He was looking at Andrew, who was sweeping the path at a little distance. Swish, swish, went his broom to right and left amongst the yellow leaves, leaving a bare space in the middle.

"Let's ask Andrew," said David suddenly.

Fortunately Andrew was in a good temper, and though he did not leave off sweeping he listened to the story with attention.

"We want your advice," said Ambrose when he had done.

Andrew stopped his broom for an instant, took off his tall black hat, and gazed into its depths silently.

"I should try a call-bird, master," he said as he put it on again.

"A call-bird?" repeated both the boys together.

Andrew nodded.

"Put a similar bird in a cage near to where t'other one used to be," he said, "and like enough it'll call the old un back."

The boys looked at him with admiration. They had a hundred questions to ask about call-birds, and Andrew's experience of them, but they soon found that it was of no use to try to make him talk any more. Andrew had said his say, and now he wanted to get on with his work.

"Isn't that a splendid thought?" said Ambrose as he and David turned away. "I shall take Jack over with me to-morrow morning in a basket, and put him into Dr Budge's cage."

"How do you suppose he'll call him back?" said David, who had become deeply interested. "P'r'aps he'll be miles and miles away."

"Well, if he can't hear he won't come," answered Ambrose; "but he may be quite near home, and only have lost his way."

"May I go with you?" was David's next question.

Ambrose hesitated. He felt that he would much rather have the whole thing in his own hands.

"You might let me help to carry him as far as the gate," pursued David. "After all, it was me that thought of asking Andrew."

"Well, then," said Ambrose, "you can ask Miss Grey if you may. But you won't want to come further than the gate?" he added in a warning tone.

David could readily promise that, for he was a good deal afraid of Dr Budge; and he ran off at once to get Miss Grey's consent.

This having been given, the two boys set off together the next morning, with Jack in a basket between them making hard angry pecks at the side of it the whole way.

They could see the doctor's cottage for some distance before they reached it, and presently the doctor himself came out and stood at the gate.

"When he sees the basket," remarked David, "he'll think we've found his jackdaw, or p'r'aps he'll think we're bringing him a new one. Won't he be disappointed?"

"I sha'n't give him time to think," said Ambrose. "I shall say, 'I've brought a call-bird,' directly I get to him."

David thought it would have been more to the purpose to say, "We've brought a call-bird," but he did not wish to begin a dispute just then, so he let the remark pass.

"Do you suppose," he said, "that he knows what a call-bird is?"

Ambrose gave a snort of contempt.

"Why, there's not a single thing he doesn't know," he answered. "He knows everything in the world."

David's awe increased as they got nearer to the cottage and Dr Budge, who stood with his hands in the pockets of his flannel dressing-gown watching their approach.

"You'd better go back now," said Ambrose when they were quite close. "I'll take the basket."

But David was not going to give up his rights, and he held firmly on to his side of the handle.

"You said I might carry it to the gate," he replied firmly; and thus, both the boys advancing, the basket was set down at the doctor's feet.

"It's a call-bird," said Ambrose very quickly, without waiting to say good-morning, while David fixed his broadest stare on the doctor's face to see the effect of the words.

Doctor Budge looked down at the basket, in which Jack now began to flutter restlessly, and then at the two boys.

"A call-bird, eh?" he said. "And what may a call-bird be?"

Ambrose felt that David was casting a glance of triumph at him. Dr Budge evidently did *not* know everything in the world. He wished David would go away, but in spite of the sharp nudge he had given him when they put the basket down, he showed no sign of moving. The meaning of the call-bird was soon made clear to the doctor, who listened attentively and said it seemed a very good idea, and that he was much obliged to them for telling him of it.

"It was Andrew who told us," broke in David, speaking for the first time. "We didn't either of us know it before."

"You'd better go home now," said Ambrose, who saw that David did not mean to notice any hints; "you'll be late for Miss Grey."

He took up the basket and gave his brother a meaning look. David's face fell. He would have liked to see Jack put into the cage, but he had promised not to want to go in. As he turned away rather unwillingly the doctor's voice fell on his ear.

"No," it said. "David shall stay too and help. I will ask Miss Grey to excuse him if he is late."

Very soon the two boys, with Dr Budge looking seriously on, had taken Jack out of his basket and put him, in spite of pecks

and struggles, into the wicker cage. When this was hung in the medlar-tree just above the bench, he became more composed, and seemed even proud of his new position, but stood in perfect silence, turning his cold grey eye downwards on the doctor and the boys.

"He doesn't look as if he meant to call," remarked David, "but I daresay he'll wait till we're gone."

Although they were all unwilling to leave the jackdaw alone, it did not seem to be of any use to stay there looking at him any longer. The doctor and Ambrose therefore went indoors to their books, and David ran quickly home to his lessons. But it was harder work than usual to attend to Latin verbs and declensions, and Ambrose wondered if Dr Budge's thoughts were as much with the jackdaw as his own.

The window looking into the garden had been left a little open so that any unusual noise could be plainly heard in the room, but for some time only the squeak of the doctor's pen broke the silence. Ambrose began to despair. It would be very disappointing to find that the call-bird was a failure, and very sad for the doctor to be without a jackdaw. Should he give him his? He was fond of his jackdaw, but then he had other pets, and the doctor was so lonely. He had only old brown books and curiosities to bear him company.

Just as he was turning this over in his mind, there came a sudden and angry cawing noise from the garden. Ambrose looked up and met the doctor's eye; without a word they both started up and made for the garden.

There was such a noise that the medlar-tree seemed to be full of jackdaws engaged in angry dispute, but when they got close under it, they found that there were only two. Ambrose's bird stood in the wicker cage, making himself as tall and upright as he could, with all the feathers on his head proudly fluffed up. He was uttering short self-satisfied croaks, which seemed to add to the rage of the other bird perched on a bough immediately above him. With his wings outspread, his head flattened, and his beak wide open, he seemed beside himself with fury at finding the stranger in his house. Screaming and scolding at the top of his voice, he took no notice of Ambrose, who ran out before the doctor and jumped up on the bench under the tree.

"Isn't it splendid?" he cried, looking back at his master. "He's come back you see, and isn't he cross? Shall I try to get him down?"

In his excitement he spoke just as he would have done to David or Nancy.

"No, no," said the doctor hastily, his face redder than usual, and putting his hand on Ambrose's shoulder, "he doesn't know you, you'd scare him away. Let me come."

He mounted on the bench beside Ambrose and stretched his arm up through the boughs of the tree.

"He knows my voice," he said. "Come, then, Jack."

Jack's only reply was an angry hiss, and a peck delivered at the doctor's hand with the whole force of his body.

"You see he knows me," said the doctor smiling, "he always does that. He's a little out of temper just now."

"Hadn't you better throw a duster over his head?" said Ambrose eagerly; "that's a very good way to catch them."

"If he'd only let me scratch his poll," said the doctor, "he'd be all right directly, but I can't get at him."

They were now joined by the doctor's housekeeper, who came out with her arms folded in her apron to see what was going on. She stood looking at the doctor's vain exertions a moment, and then said:

"Best take away t'other, master, he'll never come to ye else."

"Why, I wonder we never thought of that!" said the doctor at once, lifting the cage off the bough. "I'm much obliged to you, Mrs Gill. Perhaps you'd kindly take it indoors out of sight, and then we'll try again."

Mrs Gill departed with the care, and the doctor once more reached up his hand to the jackdaw.

"Come, then, Jack," he said in a soothing tone.

The bird hesitated a moment, and then, to Ambrose's great excitement, stepped on to the offered finger, and allowed himself to be drawn down from the tree. After this, his cage being brought out with no signs of the stranger, and some choice morsels of food placed in it, he showed no more bad temper, but marched in at the door, and began to eat greedily.

The doctor breathed a sigh of relief at this happy ending, and Ambrose, with his own jackdaw in the basket again, stood by with a proud smile on his face.

"Wasn't it a good plan?" he said. "And now you'll cut his wing, won't you? else p'r'aps he'll get away again."

"We shall see, we shall see," said Dr Budge, reaching up to hang the cage on its old nail in the window. "At any rate I am very much obliged to you, and to David, and to Andrew—a friend in need is a friend indeed."

It was wonderful, Ambrose thought on his way home, that Dr Budge had remembered three names and got them all right. Nancy came running to meet him at the white gate.

"Well," she cried, "has he come back?"

"It's all right," said Ambrose, "and Dr Budge is very much obliged to us."

He spoke importantly, which was always trying to Nancy.

"Do you suppose," she continued, "that the doctor's jackdaw really heard yours call, or would he have come back anyway?"

It struck Ambrose for the first time that his own jackdaw had not made a single sound before the other one had returned. If he had called, it would certainly have been heard through the open window of the study.

"Did you *hear* him call?" persisted Nancy. "Because if you didn't, I don't believe he had anything to do with it, and you might just as well have left him at home."

Ambrose walked on very fast into the house, but there was no escape from Nancy, who kept pace with him, insisting on a reply. The only one he had to give was a very frequent one on such occasions:

"How silly you are, Nancy!" And he began to feel the gravest doubts as to whether his jackdaw had really been of use.

Be this as it might, there was no doubt at all that Dr Budge was really grateful, and as the days went on Ambrose began to like his master more and more, and to feel quite at home with him. He seemed, since the recovery of the jackdaw, to be much less absent-minded, and looked at Ambrose now as though he were

a boy and not a volume. Ambrose felt the difference in the gaze which he often found kindly fixed on him, and it made him think that he would like to ask Dr Budge's help in other matters than lessons.

This was on his mind more strongly than usual one particular morning when he had been to Dr Budge for about three weeks. Instead of opening his books at once and setting to work as usual, he rested his elbow on the top of the pile, gazed earnestly at his master, and presently gave a deep sigh. Dr Budge was writing busily, and at first was quite ignorant of the gaze, but at the sigh he looked up.

"Anything the matter, Ambrose?" he asked. "N-no," answered Ambrose. "There's nothing the matter exactly, only to-day's mother's birthday."

"Well, there's nothing to look mournful about in that, is there?" asked the doctor kindly. "Your mother will be home again soon, won't she?"

Ambrose looked down at his Latin grammar and got rather red.

"I was thinking," he said, "that we meant to open the museum to-day, and now it can't ever be opened."

"How's that?" asked the doctor.

This question was hard to answer all at once, but it led to others until the whole unlucky history of the crock and Miss Barnicroft's money, and the failure of the museum, was unfolded. It took a very long time, but as he went on Ambrose found it easier to talk about than he could have supposed. The doctor was an admirable listener. He said almost nothing, but you could see by his face, and the way in which he nodded at the right places, that he was taking it all in. He did not seem surprised either at anything in the affair, and treated it all with great gravity, though from time to time his eyes twinkled very kindly.

"And so," he said when Ambrose had finished, "the museum's never been opened?"

"Never really opened," said Ambrose, "and we wanted mother to do it on her birthday. The worst of it is," he added more shyly, "that father said he couldn't trust me any more. I mind that more than anything. It doesn't so much matter for David, because he's such a little boy, but I'm the eldest next to Pennie."

"But all this was some time ago," said the doctor. "Have you been careful to be quite obedient ever since it happened?"

Ambrose thought a moment.

"I think so," he said. "You see there hasn't been much to be obedient about, only just little everyday things which don't make any difference."

"You want something hard to do, eh?" asked the doctor.

Ambrose nodded.

"There's nothing much harder to learn than obedience, my boy," said the doctor, looking kindly at him. "It takes most of us all our lives to learn it. Latin's much easier."

"But," said Ambrose with an uneasy wriggle, "being obedient doesn't show. I want something to show father."

Dr Budge looked absently out of the window a moment, and Ambrose began to be afraid that he had forgotten all about the subject. But he suddenly looked round and said:

"Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Seeing Ambrose's puzzled stare he continued:

"You see we must remember that the best and most useful things do not always make the most noise in the world. The man who rules his spirit to obedience does not do anything that 'shows' at all. Very often no one knows what he has done. The man who takes the city does it with noise and tumult, and gets fame and praise. Yet of those two the first perhaps does the harder thing, and may be more useful to his fellow-creatures. And it is just the little common things which come every day and don't show that we must be careful about, because they keep us ready to obey in a great thing if we are called to do it. So if I were you, Ambrose," said the doctor, smiling very kindly as he ended this speech, "I would be careful about the things that don't show. Your father will know then that he can trust you, though you may think they are too little and common to make any difference."

Ambrose had never heard Dr Budge say so much before on any subject, and indeed he was generally rather sparing of his words. It was all the more flattering, therefore, that he should take all this trouble, and he had looked so very kind while he

was talking that Ambrose said to himself, "I'm very glad we got his jackdaw back."

He went home full of the best resolutions possible, which he carried out so well for the next few days that Nancy asked in surprise: "Why are you so good?" feeling sure that something must have happened.

Dr Budge said nothing more about the museum or anything approaching it for some days, and Ambrose thought he had forgotten all about it. He was quite startled, therefore, when his master, suddenly leaning forward over his desk, said one morning:

"I suppose you and David still want to fill the museum?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, "of course we do!"

"Well, then," said Dr Budge, "I want to go to the chalk-pit beyond Rumborough to-morrow, and if you were both to go with me we might find something that would do for it."

Ambrose was speechless. He stared at the doctor's kind red face almost as though he was frightened at the proposal.

"I could give you some fossils of my own," said the doctor, glancing round at his dusty treasures, "but it would be better to find something for yourselves. You could learn a little by doing that."

"Would you really take us?" said Ambrose; "how awfully kind of you!" He spoke under his breath, for it seemed too good to be true.

"You see," said the doctor, "one good turn deserves another. You and David helped me to find Jack, so it is only fair that I should help you to fill the museum. If we get on well you can open it when your mother comes home, instead of on her birthday. Wouldn't that be a good plan?"

Ambrose hardly knew how he got over the road between the doctor's cottage and the Vicarage that day, he was in such haste to tell the wonderful news to David. They went up after dinner to the deserted museum, and looked at it with fresh interest. It was dim and dusty now, but how different it would be when it was filled with all the really valuable objects they would find with the doctor's help! Did it want any more shelves? they wondered. David had put up so many that there was

hardly a bare space left on the walls, and it was decided that for the present no more should be added.

"But I'll tell you what," said David, "we'll get a mop, and a pail, and a scrubbing-brush, and give it a regular good clean out. Then it'll be quite ready."

The afternoon was spent happily in this way, Nancy looking wistfully in at the door and longing to assist. As usual, however, she was not allowed any part in the affairs of the museum, and after a few jeering remarks she went slowly down-stairs.

"It *is* dull," she said to herself, "now Pennie isn't at home."

Poor Nancy felt this more and more as the days went on. No Pennie, no one in the nursery, and the boys entirely engaged in their new pursuit. It was very dull. She would willingly have taken an interest in the museum too, and when she heard that the boys were to go with the doctor to the chalk-pit, she felt her lot was hard indeed. It was so exactly what she would have liked, and yet because she was a girl she might have no part in it. When they came home, full of importance and triumph, with some ugly-looking stones and some very long names to write on the labels, she followed them into the school-room.

"I wish I could go next time," she said, for the doctor had promised another expedition soon. "I'm sure Dr Budge would like me to, and I could find things every bit as well as you could."

"Dr Budge wouldn't want to teach girls," said David. "He teaches us *jology*. Girls needn't know anything about *jology*."

"I don't want to," said Nancy frankly, "but I should love to go to the chalk-pit with that funny old Dr Budge."

"Well," said David decidedly, "you can't have anything to do with the museum. It's always been mine and Ambrose's. If we get a nice lot of things," he added in a satisfied voice, "we mean to open it on the day mother comes back."

"Oh dear me," exclaimed Nancy, "how I wish Saturday would come! Pennie and I shall have lots to talk about then, which you don't know anything about."

For it had been settled that Pennie was to return from Nearminster on Saturday, and Nancy, feeling herself left outside all that was going on, longed eagerly for the day. She would

then have someone to talk to all to herself, and there would also be lots to hear about Kettles. Pennie certainly wrote long letters, but Nancy thought them not to be compared to conversations, and she had so many questions to ask that were too small to be written. Above all, there were the boots and stockings to be bought. She would not do this alone, though when she passed the village shop and saw them hanging up it was very hard to help going in. So the time went on, very slowly for Nancy just now, but at last the week ended and Saturday came.

Chapter Eleven.

Keturah.

The house at Easney was merrier and more noisy than it had been for some time on the day of Pennie's return, but the house at Nearminster went back at once to its old gravity and silence. Had it always been so still and quiet? Miss Unity wondered. If so, she had never noticed it until Pennie had come and gone. Now it seemed so strange and unaccustomed that it made her quite restless and unable to settle down to her usual morning employments. She tried them one after another in vain. It was of no use. She could neither add up her accounts, nor read her newspaper, nor do her wool-work with the least satisfaction.

Almost without knowing it she went aimlessly into her bedroom, and from there into the little pink-chintz room which had been Pennie's. Betty had already made it so neat and trim that it looked forlornly empty with no signs of its late owner. So Miss Unity thought at first, but glancing round it she saw that careless Pennie had left her thimble on the table, and one of her dancing shoes in a corner.

Miss Unity picked up the thimble and fitted it absently on to the top of her own finger. How Pennie had disliked sewing, and dancing too, and how very very glad she had been to go home that morning! How she had flung herself upon Nancy and smothered her with kisses; how happy and smiling her face had looked as she drove away from the door, talking so eagerly to her sister that she had almost forgotten to wave a last good-bye to Miss Unity at the window.

"Well, it was natural, I would not have it otherwise," said Miss Unity to herself as she finished her reflections; "it is right that the child should love her home best."

But she sighed as she went back to the sitting-room and took up her work again. Opposite to her was the high-backed chair in which Pennie had spent so many weary hours, bending with a frown over Kettles' garments. But the chair was empty, and there was something in the way it stood which so annoyed Miss Unity that she pushed it up against the wall almost impatiently. Then her eye fell on a pile of white clothes neatly folded on a side-table. Pennie had finished them all, and Miss Unity had promised that she and Nancy should come over and present them to Kettles before long. From this her thoughts went on to Kettles herself, and Anchor and Hope Alley. At this moment Betty appeared at the door with a face full of woe.

"I've just had an accident, Miss," she said.

Betty's accidents usually meant broken china, but this time it was something worse. She had sprained her wrist badly.

"You must go at once to the doctor, Betty," said Miss Unity, looking nervously at the swollen member; "and, oh dear me! it's your right one isn't it?"

"Yes, Miss, worse luck," said Betty.

"We must have someone in," continued Miss Unity still more nervously; "you ought not to use it, you know, for a long time."

"I don't want no strangers, Miss," said Betty with a darkening face, "they break more than they make. I can make shift, I daresay, with my left hand."

"Now you know that's quite out of the question, Betty," said her mistress, doing her best to speak severely, "you couldn't lift a saucepan, or even make a bed. You must certainly have someone. Some nice respectable char-woman."

"There's ne'er a one in the town," said Betty, "as you'd like to have in the house. I know what they are—a lazy gossiping set."

Miss Unity rose with decision.

"I shall go and ask Mrs Margetts at the College to tell me of someone trustworthy," she said, "and I do beg, Betty, that you will go at once to the doctor."

But though she spoke with unusual firmness Miss Unity was inwardly very much disturbed, and she quite trembled as she put on her bonnet and started off to see old Nurse. For Betty, like many faithful old servants, was most difficult to manage sometimes. She had ruled Miss Unity's house single-handed so long that she could not endure the idea of help, or "strangers in the kitchen," as she called it. Miss Unity had never dared to suggest such a thing until now, and she felt very doubtful as to its success, for she foresaw little peace in the house for some time to come. Complaints, quarrels, changes, wounded feelings on Betty's part, and so on; a constant worry in the air which would be most distressing to anyone of an orderly and quiet mind. Poor Miss Unity sighed heavily as she reached the College and climbed Nurse's steep staircase.

Nurse was full of sympathy, but before she could bring her mind to the question of charwomen she had to go over all her experience of sprains and what was best for them—how some said this, and some said exactly the opposite, and how she herself, after trying all the remedies, had finally been cured by some stuff which folks called a quack medicine, but she thought none the worse of it for that. Miss Unity sat patiently and politely listening to all this, and at last gently repeated:

"And do you know of a respectable woman, Mrs Margetts, who would come in and help Betty for a time?"

Nurse shook her head. "There's no one, I'm afraid, Miss, not one that Betty would like to have. You see she's rather particular, and if a person isn't *just so*, as one might say, it puts her out."

Miss Unity knew that only too well.

"I must have someone," she said; "you see Betty will be helpless for some time; she can't do much with one hand."

Nurse nodded, and pursed up her lips in deep thought.

"You wouldn't like a little gal, Miss?" she asked suddenly.

"A little girl!" repeated Miss Unity in some dismay.

"I was thinking p'r'aps that it wouldn't put Betty about so much," continued Nurse. "You see she could make a girl do things her way where she couldn't order about a grown woman, and really there's some girls of fourteen or so'll do as much work, and do it most as well with someone to look after 'em."

"But," said Miss Unity, "don't they break things dreadfully?"

Nurse laughed. "Why there's all sorts, Miss," she said. "Some are naturally neat-handed and sharp. It's the dull stupid ones that has the heavy hands in general."

"Well," said Miss Unity hesitatingly, "supposing Betty should like the idea—do you know of one who could come?"

She had a sort of feeling that Nurse was thinking of Kettles, so that her answer was hardly a surprise.

"There's the little girl Miss Pennie was so set on. She could come, for her mother's about again now, and a decent woman she is, though she's so badly off."

A month ago the bare idea of having anyone from Anchor and Hope Alley into her house would have been impossible to Miss Unity; but Pennie had made her so familiar with the name and affairs of Kettles, and she had taken so much interest in making her clothes, that it no longer seemed so strange. Still, what would Betty say? A girl out of Anchor and Hope Alley, who had never been in a decent house before! It was surely too bold a step.

"You see, Miss," went on Nurse, "it isn't as if you wanted her to wait on you, or to open the door or such like. All she's got to do is to help Betty below stairs, and to make beds, and so on. She'll soon learn, and I'll be bound she'll answer better than a char-woman."

Miss Unity took her departure with this bold idea becoming more and more fixed in her mind. There was a great deal in what Nurse had said, if she could only induce Betty to look at it in the same way; and above all how delighted Pennie would be, when she next came, to find Kettles not only wearing the clothes she had made; but actually established in the house. It all seemed to fit in so well that Miss Unity gathered courage. She had come out that morning feeling depressed and worried, and as though everything would go wrong; but now, as she turned into the Close, wondering how she should best open the subject to Betty, she was quite stirred and interested.

Betty had come back from the doctor with her arm in a sling. She was to keep it as still as possible, and on no account to try to use it.

"So you see, Betty," said Miss Unity earnestly, "the importance of having someone to help you in your work."

"Yes, Miss," said Betty, with suspicion in every feature, and quite prepared to object to any person her mistress had secured.

"And I have made up my mind," went on Miss Unity, "not to have a char-woman."

"Ho, indeed, Miss!" said Betty, still suspicious.

"I know you object to them," said her mistress, "and Mrs Margetts advises me to try a little girl she knows, who lives near here."

If possible she would avoid the mention of Anchor and Hope Alley.

"It's for you to please yourself, Miss," said Betty stiffly.

"Of course it would be an immense advantage to the girl to be under a competent servant like yourself, for although she's intelligent she has never been in service before. Miss Pennie was very much interested in her," added Miss Unity as an afterthought.

If Betty had a soft corner in her heart for anyone but her mistress it was for Pennie. She did not at all approve of Miss Unity's taking up with these new fancies, but to please Pennie she would put up with a good deal. It was with something approaching a smile that she said:

"Oh, then, it's the little girl out of Anchor and Hope Alley, isn't it, Miss? Her as Miss Pennie made the clothes for and used to call Kettles?"

"Well," said Miss Unity reluctantly, "I am sorry to say she does live there, but Mrs Margetts knows her mother well, and she's a very deserving woman. We sha'n't call the girl Kettles—her name is Keturah. You'll have to teach her, you know, Betty," she added apologetically.

As to that, Betty had no objection. She had a deal rather, she said, have a girl who knew nothing and was willing to learn, than one who had got into wrong ways and had to be got out of them. In short, she was quite ready to look with favour on the

idea, and to Miss Unity's great surprise it was settled without further difficulty that Kettles was to come on trial.

With her usual timidity, however, she now began to see the other side of the question, and to be haunted by all sorts of misgivings. When she woke in the middle of the night dreadful pictures presented themselves of Kettles' father stealing upstairs with a poker in his hand in search of the plate-basket. She could hear the dean saying when the theft was discovered:

"Well, Miss Unity, what can you expect if you will have people in your house out of Anchor and Hope Alley?"

It would no doubt be a dreadful risk, and before she went to sleep again she had almost decided to give up the plan altogether. But morning brought more courage, and when she found Betty ready to propose that the girl should come that very day she could not draw back.

"I can soon run her up a cotton frock, and she can have one of my aprons, and there's all her other clothes nice and ready," said Betty in a business-like tone.

So Kettles came, newly clothed from top to toe and provided with plenty of good advice by old Nurse. At first Miss Unity hardly knew she was in the house, for Betty kept her strictly in the background, and hurried her away into corners whenever her mistress appeared in the kitchen. Judging, however, from the absence of complaint that things were going on well, she at last ventured to inquire how Betty liked her new help.

"She's a sharp little thing, Miss," said Betty. "Of course she's strange to the ways of a house, coming from where she does. But she's willing, that's the great thing."

"Can the child read and write?" was Miss Unity's next question.

But Betty seemed to think she had nothing whatever to do with this part of Kettles' education.

"I'm sure I don't know, Miss," she said. "I've enough to do to teach her to sweep a room properly."

Upon inquiry it was found that Kettles did not even know her letters.

"I never had no time to go to school," she said, "and I don't want to, either."

"But," said Miss Unity, greatly distressed, "you can't read your Bible, then, Keturah."

"Mother, she reads the Bible," said Kettles, as though that were sufficient.

Miss Unity went upstairs full of uneasy thought. What could be done? She could not send Keturah to school. It would be absurd to provide Betty with help, and then to take it away for half the day. She could not ask Betty to teach her. Finally, she could not let the child remain in this dreadful state of ignorance. There was one way out of the difficulty which stared Miss Unity in the face, however much she tried to avoid seeing it. She could teach Keturah herself in the evening after her work was done. Miss Unity shrank from it. She had never been brought close to poor people, and she had never taught anyone anything in her life. She was as shy of Kettles as though she were a grown-up woman, and it was altogether a most distasteful idea. Do what she would, however, she could not get rid of it. Her sense of duty at length conquered, as usual, and Keturah, with very clean hands and an immense white apron, appeared in the sitting-room one night to take her first lesson.

Miss Unity felt very nervous at first, and it was strange to have Kettles so close to her, but by degrees this wore off, and she even began to feel a sort of pleasure in the lessons. It was no trouble to teach her, for, as Betty said, she was "one of the sharp ones," and was, besides, eager to do her best. Not because she wished to know how to read, which she rather despised, but because she wanted very much to please her mistress, for whom she had a great admiration.

So things went on very well at Nearminster, both upstairs and down-stairs, and the time soon came when Miss Unity found herself looking forward to the knock at the door, which was followed by the appearance of Kettles and her spelling-book. This interest partly made up for the loss of Pennie, which had left a sad blank in Miss Unity's life at first. Here was another little living creature she could teach, rebuke, praise, and care for, and if Kettles could not fill Pennie's place in Miss Unity's heart, she could at least give it enough to do to keep it warm and active.

Although she would not have confessed it, her interest in the black children of Karawayo began to fade just now, and though she still attended the Working Societies and kept the missionary-box on her hall table, she was much more really concerned about Keturah's first pot-hooks and hangers.

Meanwhile the new maid showed such marked progress in household matters that Betty gradually allowed her to appear upstairs, and on some occasions to open the door to visitors.

"What a nice, bright little maid you have!" said Mrs Merridew, who was calling one afternoon. "One of the Easney school-children, I suppose. Country girls are so superior."

"I've always noticed that," said the dean, as Miss Unity paused before replying, "the town children are sharp enough, but they're generally wicked. And the country children are honest and steady enough, but as a rule they're so dull."

Miss Unity listened with the respect she always showed to any remarks of the dean as he went on to enlarge on the subject. Once she would have agreed with him as a matter of course, but now she had a sort of feeling that she really knew more about it than he did. What would he say if he knew that the bright little maid Mrs Merridew had admired came from the very depths of Anchor and Hope Alley?

Time went quickly by, till it was nearly a month since Pennie had gone away, and Keturah had come to help Betty. She had come "on trial" as a stop-gap only, but no one said a word about her leaving yet. Certainly Betty's wrist was still weak, and this gave Miss Unity an excuse she was glad to have. She almost dreaded the day when Betty should put off her sling and declare herself quite well, for that would mean that there was no longer any reason for keeping Keturah.

"I am thinking, Betty," she said one morning, "of asking the young ladies from Easney to come over to tea to-morrow. Miss Pennie will be interested to see how well Keturah has got on."

Betty brightened up at once.

"I'll see and make some hot-cakes then, Miss," she said; "them as Miss Pennie likes."

"And I want you," added Miss Unity, "to let Keturah bring up the tea-things. The young ladies don't know she is here, and it will be a nice surprise for them."

Betty entering heart and soul into the plot, which Miss Unity had been considering for some days, a letter was despatched to Easney, the cakes made, and Keturah carefully drilled as to her behaviour.

Pennie and Nancy had been expecting the invitation, and were quite ready for it when it came, with Kettles' new boots and stockings made into a parcel. Andrew might drive them into Nearminster and leave them at Miss Unity's for an hour, Miss Grey said, and she hoped they would be sure to start back punctually.

"How funny it seems," said Pennie as the cathedral towers came in sight, "to be going back to Nearminster!"

"Would you like to be going to stop there again?" asked Nancy.

"Well of course I like being at home best," answered Pennie, "but there were some things I liked at Nearminster. Let me see," counting on her fingers, "there were Miss Unity, and old Nurse, and Betty, and Sabine Merridew, and Kettles, and the Cathedral, and the market, and the College. That's five people and three things. And what I didn't like were needlework and dancing, and the dean, and Monsieur Deville, and all the other Merridews."

"I hope Betty's made hot-cakes for tea," said Nancy as the carriage stopped at Miss Unity's door.

"How can she, with only one hand?" said Pennie; and then the door opened and there was Betty herself, with her arm still in a sling, and a face shining with welcome.

"Lor', Miss Pennie, it do seem natural to see you again, to be sure," she said with a giggle of delight. "And Miss Nancy's rosy cheeks too. The mistress is expecting you; run upstairs to her, my dears."

She went towards the kitchen with a shake of the head and a short laugh, as if she had some inward cause for amusement.

"Betty seems to like having a sprain," said Nancy, looking at her over the balusters. "I never saw her look so pleased or laugh so much."

Miss Unity's welcome was quite as hearty as Betty's, but she too seemed a little odd, and inclined to give nervous glances at the door as though she expected some one to come in.

"Would you like us to go and help Betty bring up tea?" asked Nancy, noticing this. "We should like it tremendously if you would let us."

She started up as she spoke, and would have rushed downstairs in another moment, if Miss Unity had not caught hold of her hand.

"No, my dear; no, thank you; certainly not," she said hurriedly. "Betty has some one to help her."

A little disappointed, Nancy sat down again. Her eyes fell on the parcel she held, and she frowned at Pennie to draw her attention to it. Pennie was looking dreamily round the sitting-room with all its old familiar objects. She wondered where Kettles' clothes, which she had left on the side-table, had been put. What a long time it seemed since she had sat sewing in that high-backed chair! Brought back to the present by Nancy's deeply frowning glance, she gave a little start and said hurriedly:

"Nancy and I have brought some new boots and stockings for Kettles. May we give them to her with the clothes?"

"And will she be at the College?" put in Nancy, "or can we go to Anchor and Hope Alley?"

Miss Unity's head gave another nervous jerk in the direction of the door. She had heard a footstep coming upstairs, which was not Betty's.

"We will see about it after tea," she said. "You shall certainly see the little girl, as I promised you."

The door opened as she spoke, and a small maid-servant in a tall cap appeared, bearing a tray. Betty hovered in the background with a face in which pride and laughter struggled together.

Kettles was not used to her new style of dress yet, and held herself stiffly as though she had been dressed up for a joke. The tangled hair which used to fall low on her forehead was tightly brushed back and tucked up in a net. Her face looked bare and unshaded, and several degrees lighter by reason of yellow soap and scrubbing. It was surmounted by a cap of Betty's, which had been cut to fit her, but was still much too tall for such a small person. Nothing remained of the old Kettles but her eyes, which still had the quick observant look in them of some nimble animal, as she advanced in triumph with her tray.

The children stared in surprise at this strange little figure without any idea that they had seen it before, while Miss Unity and Betty watched them with expectant smiles.

"This is my new little maid," said Miss Unity.

Kettles dropped a curtsy, and having put down her tray, stood with her arms hanging straight beside her, and her bright eyes fixed on the children.

All at once Pennie gave her sister a nudge.

"Why, don't you see?" she exclaimed; "I really do believe it's Kettles!"

"We call her Keturah," said Miss Unity smiling kindly. "She is a very good little girl. Keturah, this is the young lady who made you all these nice clothes. You must say 'thank you' to her."

Pennie hung shyly back. She did not want to be thanked, and she was quite afraid of Kettles now that she was so neat and clean.

"Do you like them?" she murmured.

Keturah chuckled faintly. "They're fine," she said. "I've got 'em all on. I don't never feel cold now."

"And," continued Miss Unity, "this other young lady, whom I think you saw once at Mrs Margetts', has been kind enough to think of bringing you some nice warm boots and stockings."

She looked at Nancy as she spoke, but for once Nancy remained in the background, clutching her parcel and staring at Kettles over Pennie's shoulder. The old Kettles, who had been in her mind all this time, was gone, and Keturah, clean, tidy, and proper, stood in her place. It was too surprising a change to be understood in a moment, and Nancy was not at all sure that she liked it.

Kettles was silent when the parcel was at length opened and presented, perhaps with excess of joy.

"Well I never!" said Betty, advancing to examine the gift. "Keturah's in luck I will say. Dear, dear, what nice stout boots, to be sure! Well, now," with a nudge to the silent figure, "she'll do her best to deserve such kindness, I know. Haven't you got a word to say to the dear young ladies?"

But Keturah could not be made to speak a word. She dropped her little curtsy, and stood as if turned to stone, clasping the boots and stockings to her chest.

"She ain't tongue-tied; not as a rule," said Betty apologetically to the children; "but she hasn't been much used to presents, and it's a little too much for her."

"I think," said Miss Unity coming to the rescue, "that we must have our tea now, Betty, or the young ladies will have no time—and Keturah can go and try on her new boots and stockings."

"They're my size," said Nancy, speaking for the first time since Keturah's appearance. "I think they'll be sure to fit."

Betty and her little maid having hurried out of the room, Miss Unity's tea-table became the object of interest. It was always very attractive to the children, because it was so different to school-room tea at Easney.

The dark deep colours of the old Derby china seemed to match the plum-cake in richness; there were Pennie's hot-cakes in a covered dish, and Nancy's favourite jam in a sparkling cut-glass tub. In its way, though very different, it was as good as having tea with old Nurse at the College. On this occasion it was unusually pleasant, because there was so much to ask and hear about Keturah.

"Aren't you glad," said Nancy, when the whole story had been fully explained, "that you've got Keturah instead of a new mandarin?"

"Nancy!" said Pennie, shocked at this bold question.

But Nancy was quite unabashed.

"You know, don't you," she said to Miss Unity, "that it was Pennie's first plan to buy you a new one. The boys promised to help, but I didn't. And then all sorts of things happened, and there was hardly any money in the box. And then we saw Kettles. And then I made Pennie give up the plan, and save for the boots and stockings. But we never thought then that she'd ever have anything to do with you."

"It was very good of Pennie to wish to get me a new mandarin," said Miss Unity, her eyes resting affectionately on her god-daughter.

"She wanted to ever so much," continued Nancy. "She wouldn't buy a book she wanted at the fair, on purpose to save her money. But after all, Kettles is much nicer to have, because you can do all sorts of things with her, and the mandarin could only nod his head."

"If it had not been for Pennie," said Miss Unity, "I should never have heard or known anything about Keturah. She has given me a new maid instead of a new mandarin."

"But she's partly from Nancy too," said Pennie, "because you see she made me like Kettles and give up the other."

"She's partly from Pennie, and partly from me, and partly from Dickie too," said Nancy thoughtfully. "If Dickie hadn't had the measles Pennie wouldn't have stopped here, and if she hadn't stopped here you would never have heard of Kettles. Dickie *did* put a penny into the box out of her slug-money. She took it out again, but she wanted to help with the mandarin. And after all she's helped to give you Kettles."

"Will she always stay here," asked Pennie, "after Betty's arm gets well?"

"If Betty finds her useful I should like her to stay," said Miss Unity, but as she spoke she felt that she should never have the courage to suggest it.

The matter was, however, taken out of her hands by Nancy, who, as soon as Betty appeared to take away the tea-things, put the question point-blank:

"You'll like Kettles to stay, won't you, Betty? because what's the good of making her look so nice if she's to go back to Anchor and Hope Alley?"

"I'm quite agreeable to it, Miss Nancy, if it suits the mistress," said Betty meekly. So the thing was settled at once. Kettles, out of Anchor and Hope Alley, had become Keturah, Miss Unity's maid in the Close.

"She looks very nice now she's Keturah," said Nancy, as the little girls drove away, "but she isn't funny any more. There was something I always liked about Kettles."

And Kettles she always remained to the children at Easney, though the name was never heard at Nearminster.

Chapter Twelve.

The Home-Coming.

"I don't believe I ever was so glad of anything in all my life," said Nancy.

She was sitting with Pennie in a favourite place of theirs, a broad window-seat at the end of a passage which looked out on the garden. It was a snug private sort of corner, and when they had any particular bit of work, or any matter they wished to talk over without the boys, it was always their habit to retire there. This morning something very special had happened. A letter from mother to Miss Grey, inclosing one for the children, to say that they were all coming back on Monday. To-day was Saturday. Only one more day and two more nights before mother and father, Dickie, baby, and nurse, would be in their right places, and the house would feel natural again.

The boys, after hearing the news, had at once rushed upstairs to the museum and had not been seen since, though, as Nancy said, there was nothing more they could possibly do to it, unless they made it untidy for the pleasure of putting it straight. For the museum was now in very fine order, with all its shelves full, and all its specimens neatly labelled and arranged. The doctor himself had climbed the steep staircase to pay a visit to it, and squeezed himself with difficulty through the low doorway. True, there was only one corner in it where he could stand upright, because the roof sloped so much and he was so tall; but if it had been a palace he could not have admired it more, or looked more really pleased with everything in it.

The boys, therefore, were quite satisfied; there could not be a better thing to celebrate the return than to open the museum. But Pennie and Nancy were quite outside all this, and they had a strong feeling that they too would like to do something remarkable on Monday. Only what should it be?

"It's of no use at all to keep on saying you're glad," said Pennie. "Of course we're glad, but what can we do to show it?"

"Couldn't we decorate the house," said Nancy, "like Christmas?"

"It would be better than nothing," said Pennie, but she evidently did not think it much of an idea.

"What do you call those things that emperors drive under when they come back from wars?" asked Nancy suddenly.

"Laurels," suggested Pennie doubtfully.

"No, no," said Nancy, "you know what I mean. I've heard you read about them to Miss Grey in history."

"Canopies," said Pennie after deep thought. But that was wrong too. Nancy bit her lips with impatience.

"It's something to do with an arch," she said, "only there's another word before it."

"I know," said Pennie, "you mean a triumphant arch."

"That's it," exclaimed Nancy with great relief. "Well, why couldn't we make a triumphant arch over the white gate for them to drive under?"

Pennie approved of this.

"If the boys would help," she added; "you and I couldn't do it alone, we shouldn't have time. And besides we should want their hammers and things."

"We must ask them at once," said Nancy springing up. "They must be tired of staring at that stupid museum."

The boys were quite ready, for there really was nothing more to do to the museum, and they were glad of a change. The next person to be appealed to was Andrew, but here came an unexpected difficulty. Andrew would not allow a single twig to be cut while master was away.

"But we must have ever-greens," insisted Ambrose, "it's to make a triumphant arch for father and mother."

But Andrew was firm. They might make as many triumphant arches as they liked after master was at home, but he couldn't cut ever-greens without orders.

"It wouldn't be a bit of use afterwards," said David. "People never have triumphant arches *after* they get back. We must have some now."

"Not from me, Master David," was Andrew's answer, and he left the children in a downcast group and went on his way. Poor

Nancy was almost in tears. It was very hard to have her plan so suddenly destroyed, but she knew that Andrew was not to be persuaded to change his mind.

"It's a shame!" she exclaimed with heated cheeks. "I'm sure mother and father would like us to have them. I shall go and ask Miss Grey."

She ran off towards the house, and Pennie followed more slowly. The boys, easily consoled by remembering that there was still the museum, gave up the triumphant arch without any more effort, and went about their own affairs.

Nancy soon came back.

"Well?" said Pennie inquiringly.

"Miss Grey's just as bad as Andrew," said Nancy moodily. "She says she couldn't give us leave to have ever-greens in father's absence."

"Why, then, we must give it up," said Pennie soothingly, "and think of something else."

"There is nothing else," said Nancy.

It made her feel cross to see Pennie take it so quietly, and, refusing to go into the house with her, she marched off rather sulkily by herself. First she wandered listlessly about the garden, casting looks of disdain at Andrew, who was quite unaware of them, and then she went down to the white gate leading into the road, and thought how beautiful the triumphant arch would have looked.

Presently she climbed on to the top of the gate, and sat there feeling very cross with all the world—with Andrew, with Miss Grey, with the boys, and even with Pennie because she was not cross too. Engaged in these moody thoughts, she at length saw a large figure coming slowly down the road towards her. It wore black baggy clothes and a wideawake hat, and it often stopped and made lines in the dusty road with the stout stick it carried. By all this Nancy knew that it was Dr Budge, and as she sat there with her chin resting on her hand she wondered how often he would stop before he reached her, to make pictures in the dust.

She thought she would count. And she began to say one, two, three, aloud, so that she might remember. The doctor got

nearer and nearer, quite unconscious of the little figure on the vicarage gate.

"Five," said Nancy's clear little voice, breaking in on his reflections as he came to a stand-still near her.

She was so used to be unnoticed by him that she was surprised to see him look quickly at her, as though he knew who she was. Not being at all shy she at once gave him a cheerful little nod.

"Five what?" asked the doctor.

"I was counting how many times you stopped before you came to the gate," said Nancy.

Dr Budge laughed. "Well, you're not very busy then, I suppose?" he said, "or is this the way you generally spend your mornings?"

"I'm not at all busy," said Nancy in an injured tone as she remembered her disappointment, "but I should like to be. I wanted to be very busy indeed, but I can't, because of that tiresome Andrew."

The doctor stood facing the gate, his stout stick in his hand, and his eyes fixed on her quite as if he knew who she was.

"He doesn't look as if he thought I was David to-day," said Nancy to herself; and encouraged by the doctor's attention she went on confidentially.

"You see, father and mother and the little ones are coming back on Monday, and the boys are going to open the museum, but Pennie and I haven't anything to do with that, and we wanted to make a triumphant arch and decorate the house, and Andrew won't let us have any ever-greens."

"A triumphant arch, eh!" said the doctor, and Nancy wondered why he smiled as he said it, as though it were something odd; "but wouldn't it be difficult for you to make that?"

"The boys would help us," said Nancy; "but it's no use thinking of it, because we can't have any ever-greens."

"It's a splendid idea," said the doctor thoughtfully. "Whose was it?"

"Mine," said Nancy proudly. She began to like Dr Budge very much.

"Why shouldn't you go up into the woods," said he after a moment. "There's plenty of ivy and holly there, and you might get as much as you liked."

"We mus'n't go there alone," said Nancy sadly, "and Miss Grey couldn't walk so far, and if she could it's too late now, for it would take us all the afternoon to get there and back, and to-morrow's Sunday."

"But you could get up early, I suppose, on Monday morning and put up the triumphant arch," persisted the doctor.

Nancy looked quickly at him with a gleam of hope in her eyes.

"If," she began, "someone could go with us—" She stopped, but the rest of the sentence was written on her face, and Dr Budge understood as well as though she had spoken it.

He nodded gravely.

"If Miss Grey gives leave," he said, "you can meet me at two o'clock at the corner of the road. And, of course, the boys are to come too."

"And Pennie," added Nancy. In her excitement she stood up on the bar of the gate as though she meant to fling herself upon the doctor's neck, but checking this impulse she climbed down and held out her hand to him.

"Thank you tremendously," she said very earnestly. "Miss Grey will be sure to let us go with you."

In this way the doctor proved himself a friend in need for the second time, and now Nancy and Pennie were loud in his praise as well as the boys. He knew so much about everything, as well as about Latin and Greek and museums. Where to find the best sort of ivy, how much would be wanted for the arch, and finally, how to get the bundle of ever-greens down the hill. He even produced out of one baggy pocket a ball of stout twine, and showed the children how to bind it all together and pull it along after them. He was the most delightful person to go out with. Miss Grey sometimes said "Not so much noise Nancy," or, "Remember you are a young lady;" but on this occasion Nancy made as much noise as she liked, scrambled about among the bushes, tore her frock, and enjoyed herself to the full.

The children went to bed happy in the thought that in spite of Andrew there was a big bundle of ever-greens in the barn, and that nothing would be wanting to the triumphant arch on Monday.

Very early in the morning it was all ready, and they stood round the white gate looking up at it with some pride, but also a little doubt.

"Doesn't it look rather wobbly?" said Nancy. "I thought pea-sticks wouldn't be strong enough, but Andrew wouldn't let us have anything else."

The ever-greens had been tied on with such a generous hand that their weight seemed a little too much for the triumphant arch, so that it trembled gently in the wind.

"Suppose," said Ambrose, "that it should fall just as father and mother drive through. And I don't believe," he added, "that Andrew, on the box, with his tall hat on, will be able to drive through without touching the top."

This seemed so likely, and was such an awful thought, that the children were silent for a moment. If Andrew's tall hat did knock against the arch it would certainly fall, and perhaps hurt the whole party.

"We must tell him to be sure to bend his head," said Pennie at last, "or it would be still better if he would take off his hat, but I'm afraid he wouldn't do that."

"Well, anyhow," said Nancy, "we can't alter it now, because we've got all the house to do. We must just leave it to chance."

Nancy was fond of leaving things to chance, and though this was a more serious matter than usual, the children at last agreed that there was nothing else to be done. The rest of the morning was spent in putting ivy and holly wherever it could be put, especially on the staircase leading up to the museum. David with his hammer nailed up wreaths and sprays as fast as Pennie and Nancy could make them, till the bare white walls were almost covered and had a very fine effect.

Ambrose meanwhile had shut himself into the school-room to carry out what he hoped would be the best idea of all. He wanted to draw the two first letters of his mother's name, MH, on cardboard, which were to be cut out, covered with ivy leaves, and put over the entrance to the museum. He could not,

however, get it to look quite right, and was so long about it that the decorations upstairs were nearly finished.

"How are you getting on?" said Nancy, rushing in. You've been long enough to draw all the alphabet. "Well," she continued, looking over her brother's shoulder, "the H isn't so bad, but I shouldn't know what the other's meant for. It looks like a sort of curly insect."

"They're old English letters," said Ambrose proudly.

"Then you'd better have drawn new English ones," said Nancy, "no one will know what they mean."

"Mother will know," said Ambrose, "she's not a silly little girl like you."

"I hope she will," replied Nancy, "for it's just dinner-time, and you can't do any more. I'll help you to stick on the ivy leaves."

Nancy was always good-natured, although she said such tiresome things.

The letters were not quite so plain to read as Ambrose had hoped, when they were put up over the museum door, but still they had an ornamental look, and gave a finishing touch to the decorations.

Nothing remained after dinner was over but to wait until four o'clock, by which time the carriage might be expected to arrive from Nearminster station. Long before that the children were ready in their places, standing two on each side of the "triumphant" arch, which nodded proudly over the white gate.

"They've lost the train, I expect," said Ambrose, "and Andrew's waiting for the next."

"I sha'n't give them up yet," said Nancy, "because the church clock hasn't struck four."

"There it is!" exclaimed Ambrose as the first strokes of the hour sounded deeply from the tower near.

"Now they may be here any minute," said David solemnly, "now, don't let us forget about Andrew's hat."

But it was yet another quarter of an hour before Ruby's white nose was seen coming steadily down the road. As it got nearer

the excitement at the gate grew so high that it did not seem likely anyone would think about Andrew's hat, or of anything beside shouts of welcome, and exclamations.

"There's Dickie on the box; she's holding the whip. Mother's got baby on her knee. They've seen us. They've seen the arch, hurrah!"

Now they were quite near, and now it suddenly appeared that one person's feelings about passing through the "triumphant" arch had not been considered. This was Ruby. In all his long life he had gone many and many a time through the white gate, but never had he seen it adorned by bunches of green bushy things which shook in the wind. He did not mind the jumping shouting little figures on each side of it in the least, but the "triumphant" arch was an insult to a horse who had lived many years at the vicarage, and knew every stick and stone near it. He planted his fore feet firmly on the ground, put his head down, and refused to stir.

"Come, my lad," said Andrew, "it's nowt to harm ye."

But Ruby would not be reasoned with, or coaxed, or forced with the whip.

It a little spoiled the triumph of the arrival, and Mr and Mrs Hawthorne sat laughing in the carriage, while Andrew went through all the forms of persuasion he knew. But at last Mrs Hawthorne had a good thought.

"Never mind, Andrew," she said, "we will all get out here, and walk through this beautiful arch. Then you can drive round the other way to the stable with the luggage."

So after all it had not been made in vain, though to walk through it was perhaps not quite so triumphant as driving would have been. It had, however, some advantages. It was easier to tell all the news and to ask all the questions as they walked up to the house together, than to shout them out running by the side of the carriage.

"I thought of the decorations," said Nancy as they entered the house, "and we all helped to put them up."

"But," added David, "we shouldn't have been able to get them at all, if Dr Budge hadn't helped us."

The decorations were very much admired, and Ambrose, who was nervously impatient to show the museum, soon thought that more than enough attention had been given to them. He grew quite vexed with Pennie and Nancy as they pointed out fresh beauties.

"Let mother and father come upstairs now," he said impatiently.

And at last they were on their way.

"What can you have to show us at the very top of the house?" asked their father as he climbed the last flight of steep stairs.

Ambrose and David had run on before, and now stood one on each side of the entrance, their whole figures big with importance, and too excited even to smile. Ambrose had prepared a speech, but he could not remember it all.

"We are glad to welcome you to the new museum at Easney," he said to his mother, "and, and—"

"And we hope," added David, "that you will declare it open, and allow it to be called the *Mary Hawthorne Museum*."

It was a moment which had been looked forward to with eagerness and delight during the past weeks, but when it really came it was even more satisfactory. When Mr and Mrs Hawthorne had left home the museum was a dusty neglected place which no one cared to enter; its very name seemed to mean trouble and disgrace; its empty shelves were like a painful reproach.

How different it looked now! Bright, clean, prosperous, with not a speck of dust anywhere, and as full as it could be of really interesting specimens. The proud little owners displayed its treasures eagerly, and there was a great deal to be told of how Dr Budge did this, and found that; his name came so often that Mrs Hawthorne said:

"I think it ought to be called the 'Budge' Museum, for the doctor seems to have had a great deal to do with it."

"He's had everything to do with it," said David; "but you see, we helped him first to find his jackdaw. That's how it all began."

"Well," said Mr Hawthorne putting his hand on Ambrose's shoulder, "I think it all began in another way. I hear that Dr Budge has had a good and industrious pupil while I have been

away, and that has made him so willing to help you. I know now that I can trust Ambrose to do his best, even though he cannot quite learn Latin in a month."

There was only just room in the museum for the two boys and their father and mother, but the other children stood outside peeping in at the open door, and adding remarks from time to time.

"You didn't present mother with the key," said Nancy, "and she hasn't declared it open."

"Here it is!" said David hurriedly. He pulled a large rusty key out of his pocket.

"It's the apple-closet key *really*," he said in a low tone to his mother, "this door hasn't got one. You must just pretend to give it a sort of twist."

The party squeezed itself into the passage again, and Mrs Hawthorne with a flourish of the big key threw open the door and exclaimed:

"I declare this museum to be open, and that it is to be henceforth known as the *Mary Hawthorne Museum*."

The evening that followed the opening of the museum was counted by the children as one of the very nicest they had ever had. It was celebrated by sitting up to supper with their father and mother, and by telling and hearing all that had passed while they had been away.

"Nancy," said Pennie to her sister when it was all over and the two little girls were in bed, "all our plans are finished; we've done all we can for Kettles, and the boys have opened the museum. What shall we think of next?"

"Well, you're not sorry they're finished, are you?" said Nancy, for Pennie had spoken sadly; "that's what we've been trying to do all the time."

"Of course I'm glad," said Pennie, "and yet I'm sorry too. It's like reading a book you like very much. You want to finish it, but how sorry you are when you come to the end."

The End.
